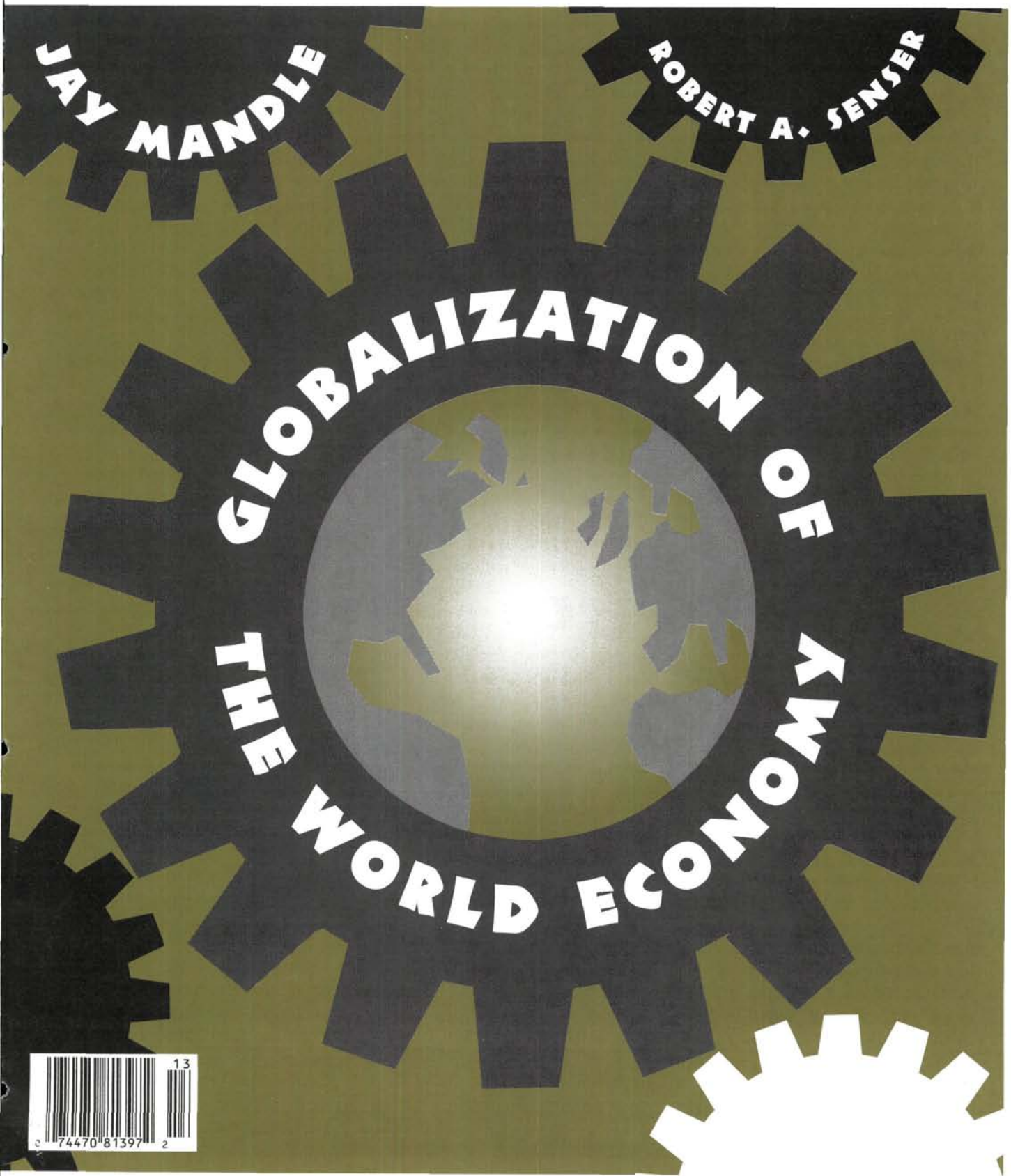
$2.25 JACK MILES ON MAILER July 18, 1997

COMMONWEAL



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To the Editors

Re: Baumann on Carroll

Paul Baumann's piece [May 23] on James Carroll's *New Yorker* article, "The Silence," is so gratuitously negative, so distorting, and so harshly and disrespectfully polemical that it is tempting to reply in kind. The temptation needs to be resisted given the importance of the issues, but a fair-minded assessment of the Baumann article must be so condemnatory as to seem itself intentionally harsh.

Set aside as comparatively minor such unprofessional and unkind characterizations of Carroll as "itching" and "insinuating," and as "trotting out" Hans Küng (of all people), but before doing so ask when a journal of such distinction started allowing contributors to speak so. If one read only Baumann on Carroll's *New Yorker* essay, the impression would be taken that the latter equates "Catholic dogmatism and Nazi totalitarianism," which is utterly false; that, as noted, Hans Küng is merely "trotted out," when in fact the interview portion with Küng is lengthy, substantive, and bracing. Baumann leads the reader to the further erroneous impression that Carroll's essay constitutes an "indictment of the pope," when, in fact, the tone and substance of Carroll's work are often and remarkably respectful, even affectionate, toward the Holy Father. (It is, however and obviously, no ultramontane tract.)

Almost everything Baumann writes is either objectionable, inaccurate, or transparently, but not forthrightly, neoconservative. (On this last point, had Baumann followed Cardinal Newman's injunction to seek "inquiry" rather than "dispute," he might have honestly engaged Carroll's theological liberalism and some light might have been shed.) But the crucial issue of which Baumann is ignorant, and which leads him to the shameful assertion that Carroll has "trivial[ized] the Holocaust" to win "intra-Catholic battles," is the relationship between religion and faithfulness. Baumann writes: "Has it occurred to Carroll that his itch to 'de-absolutize' religion is incompatible with monotheism?"

Abraham Joshua Heschel apparently had the same itch, writing: "God is greater than religion; faith is greater than dogma." So, too, did Paul Tillich, who said that "...in the depth of every living religion...that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to a spiritual freedom and with it to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence." And our beloved and great Catholic father of this century, Karl Rahner, said even of the doctrine of Christ: "Let none say that nothing more is really possible...anymore. Something is possible because something *must* [Rahner's emphasis] be possible, if it is a matter of the inexhaustible riches of God's presence with us....Every formula transcends itself...not because it is false but because it is true."

De-absolutizing religion is precisely the path to monotheism. Whatever else is at work in Baumann's assessment of Carroll's narratively rich, theologically challenging, and morally prophetic essay, surely the greatest defect of the author in this instance is his failure to understand the defining link between the repudiation of triumphalism and the love of the Holy One!

PADRAIC O'HARE
Medway, Mass.

The writer is professor of religious studies and faculty associate of the Center for Study of Jewish-Christian Relations at Merrimack College, North Andover, Mass.

The author replies:

Padraic O'Hare has a small talent for name calling (neoconservative!) and name dropping (Newman, Heschel, Tillich, Rahner), but evidently he can't remember either what he's read or what he himself has written. I fear it will come as something of a shock to most readers of James Carroll's *New Yorker* essay that O'Hare found it a "remarkably respectful, even affectionate" portrait of the pope, since both those who praise Carroll and those who criticize him do so for the same reason: because he repeatedly links John Paul II's theological conservatism and exercise of papal authority to the Holocaust as well as to a host of other evils. What does O'Hare think Hans Küng's indictment of the church as "co-responsible" for the Holocaust means, if it does not equate Catholic dogmatism and Nazi totalitarianism? But, then, O'Hare knows exactly what Carroll is up to, because Carroll relies on O'Hare's own words to make his case. "For Christianity," Carroll quotes O'Hare, "the fundamental fact of absolutism, the false pride on which it rests, and the demonization of the other to which it leads, is the Holocaust."

Now, we're all opposed to "absolutism," we're all opposed to "the demonization of the other," and we're all opposed to "triumphalism." But O'Hare merely brandishes these loaded terms to distract attention from his radical theological agenda. I urge readers to turn to page 67 of the April 7 *New Yorker*; there you will learn that the "false pride" O'Hare refers to is not triumphalism or absolutism as ordinarily understood and disingenuously used in his letter, but instead refers to the insistence of "traditional theologians," such as Karl Rahner, "upon the primacy of Jesus as a means of salvation." Carroll identifies O'Hare, however, as a theologian who has moved beyond such supposedly antiquated attachments. Indeed, O'Hare equates "'universalist Christian claims' about Jesus with 'religion as a source of brutality.'" As Carroll and O'Hare see it, "Catholic

(Continued on page 4)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FOUNDED 1924

COMMONWEAL

July 18, 1997 / Volume CXXIV, Number 13

UP FRONT

Correspondence *Paul Baumann and columnist David R. Carlin, Jr., engage in colloquy with their critics.* 2

Editorial *Now the hard part* 5

Et cetera *Ban the bun* 6

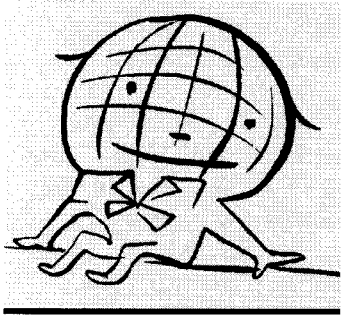
Notebook *Breakfast special*
Paul Baumann 7

COLUMNISTS

White noise
John Garvey
Writers who cut through the soullessness of our time. 8

Don't tear down fences
David R. Carlin, Jr.
Boundaries bestow benefits. 9

ARTICLES



THE GOOD SIDE OF GOING GLOBAL
Jay Mandle
Globalization has become the new bugbear of liberal economists. But they forget the benefits of growth. 11

TO END SWEATSHOPS
Robert A. Senser
In response to new consumer awareness, heightened by globalization, big-name companies with labor contractors abroad have begun to institute labor codes. 14

THE LURE OF AMERICAN JOBS
Robert Joe Stout
From Oaxaca, Mexico, to north of the border and back—but with precious little to show for it. 16

POETRY

The Boys of Summer
Robert C. Jones
Distant Cries
William John Watkins 13

VERDICTS

SCREEN

Citizen Ruth
Richard Alleva
Can the abortion conflict be entertainingly satirized? From gun-toting, born-again prolifers to lesbian pro-choicers, Citizen Ruth *is a surprisingly effective spoof.* 18

MEDIA

Millennium
Frank McConnell 19

BOOKS

The Gospel according to the Son
by Norman Mailer
Jack Miles
Mailer's attempt to reimagine the Gospel is not nearly as awful as his critics would have you believe. But neither is it very illuminating. 21

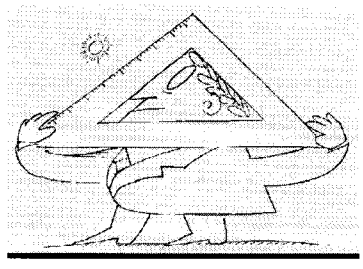
Walker Percy *by Patrick Samway*
J. Bottom 22

Upholding Mystery
Edited by David Impastato
Daria Donnelly 24

And God Saw That It Was Good
Edited by Drew Christiansen and Walter Grazer
The Best Preaching on Earth
Edited by Stan L. LeQuire
William Simpson 26

The Case against the Global Economy
Edited by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith
John Zmirak 27

THE LAST WORD



Try, try again
Jacqueline Bell Mosio 30

COMMONWEAL 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115 • (212) 662-4200

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from page 2)
universalist claims" inevitably lead to "the age-old Christian impulse to make devils of those who beg to differ." The remedy, Carroll's so-called "lesson of the Holocaust," is to "de-absolutize Christian claims." In short, Christ must be regarded as just one of many religious truths and ways. That's what O'Hare's high-sounding phrase, the "repudiation of triumphalism and the love of the Holy One," means.

Needless to say, it is especially saddening to see Karl Rahner now trotted out (there I go again!) to justify Carroll's and O'Hare's abandonment of a Christocentric understanding of "the ultimate meaning of man's existence." Rahner, like John Paul II, deserves better. And certainly the memory of the Holocaust does. If Carroll and O'Hare want to cash in 2,000 years of Christian theology for the pottage of "in the depth of every living religion...that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to a spiritual freedom," etc., they are free to do so. But leave the victims of Nazi genocide out of it.

Finally, since O'Hare doesn't bother to define his terms, it is impossible to decipher what his brief discussion of God, religion, faith, and dogma means, or how he reconciles the first commandment of monotheism—"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"—with what he characterizes as the tension between "religion and faithfulness." Suffice it to say, I generally consider it a mistake to juxtapose the terms God and religion or faith and dogma in the way O'Hare evidently likes to. That "God is greater than religion" is a statement no theologically literate person would disagree with. But how we come to know God outside of revelation and the traditions and teachings of the church is a more subtle question, one hardly illuminated by the incantation of phrases such as "the inexhaustible riches of God's presence."

Catholics can easily avoid the dangers of triumphalism while professing what Rahner rightly called "the absolute religion," by which he meant a religion that proclaims the salvation won by Christ is "intended for all men." In fact, the high regard in which the current pope is held by leaders of other religious communities is a good example of how to strike that balance, and that's what really galls O'Hare and Carroll.

PAUL BAUMANN

Donohue for the defense

It is not easy to defend yourself against charges of being "semiparanoid" and "un-American," and this is especially true when the accuser cites not one example to buttress his case [David R. Carlin, Jr., "Donohue's Crusade," May 23]. So I won't even try.

But I will say this much: I do not know one black or Jew who ever thought it was un-American for his people to establish a civil rights organization. That prize is the exclusive preserve of Catholic malcontents.

It has become increasingly clear to me that many progressive Catholics detest the church as it exists and love only some abstract church that exists solely in their minds. In any event, I do have some bad news for Mr. Carlin. He worries that the Catholic League "may actually succeed." He should know that we have grown from 11,000 members four years ago to 350,000 today, and with no end in sight. Not bad for a "semiparanoid" organization.

WILLIAM A. DONOHUE
New York, N.Y.

The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

An unbalanced appraisal

I write to take exception to David R. Carlin, Jr.'s critique of William Donohue. While I am a lifelong reader of and sometime contributor to *Commonweal*, Bill Donohue is a long-standing friend and colleague. He doesn't merit being dismissed as an "entertaining character" with a "very sensitive nose"—an anti-Irish caricature, eh what? Nor does the Catholic League merit being termed a "semiparanoid" organization.

Carlin is correct to note a difference between types of discrimination; he is incorrect to claim that only those forms of discrimination that entail social or economic deprivation (jobs, schools, clubs, housing) are legitimate targets of protest. The battleground has shifted—not so much to philosophical issues, which are indeed debatable, but to the cultural domain in which belief and act intersect, such as the display of religious symbols on public grounds at Christmas or of the Ten Commandments in a courtoom.

Donohue's efforts are legitimate and laudable. He and the once-dormant organization he has been instrumental in vitalizing have called attention to everything from Hollywood efforts to paint clerics *en masse* as guilty of homosexuality and pederasty to stereotypical presentations of papal rulings on abortion by advocates of birth and population control.

I know of not a single instance in which secularism as such has been attacked by Donohue. One may argue with his stance toward different groups within the church—for example, the business of gay and lesbian rights in relation to the Saint Patrick's Day parade, or his concerns over an insensitive anti-Catholicism in evangelical and fundamentalist varieties of Protestantism. But nothing in the Catholic League's brochures and bulletins can be construed as identifying anti-Catholic sentiment with secularist beliefs as such.

Finally, it may not be such a bad idea for those who would malign Catholicism "to hide behind trees and bushes"—or would Carlin prefer loud and raucous attacks on the church and its vicars as proof that

(Continued on page 29)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STAFF

Editor: **Margaret O'Brien Steinfels**
Executive Editor: **Paul Baumann**
Managing Editor: **Patrick Jordan**
Production Editor: **Jacqueline Dowdell**
Senior Writer: **Robert G. Hoyt**
Poetry: **Rosemary Deen**
Design: **Emil Antonucci**
Screen: **Richard Alleva**
Media: **Frank McConnell**
Columnists: **John Garvey, Abigail McCarthy, David R. Carlin, Jr., Sidney Callahan**
Editorial Assistant: **Bernard G. Prusak**
Staff: **Harriette Balsky, Carmen P. Alava, Sandra Smith**
Advertising Manager: **Ruth E. Taylor**
Publisher: **Edward S. Skillin**

Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly except Christmas/New Year's; and monthly July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY, 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, ME 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 475 Riverside Dr. POSTMASTER: send address changes to Commonweal, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 405, New York, NY 10115.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, OH 44691. *Commonweal* articles also are available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic data bases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional offices. Copyright © 1997 Commonweal Foundation. Single Copy, $2.25. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $44; Canada, $47; foreign, $50. Special two-year rate: U.S. $75; Canada, $81; foreign, $87. Annual rates for air-mail delivery outside U.S.: Western Hemisphere, $84; Europe, $89; other parts of the world, $99. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Illustrations: Cover, Antonucci; p. 3, Charlot; pp. 3, 11, 18, 21, Valerry; pp. 6, 26, Ray, Rothco; pp. 7, 24, Ross, Rothco; pp. 8, 20, 28, Schwadron, Rothco; p. 10, Matt, Rothco; p. 15, Szabo, Rothco; p. 23, Franke Keating; columnist portraits, Elaine Mills.

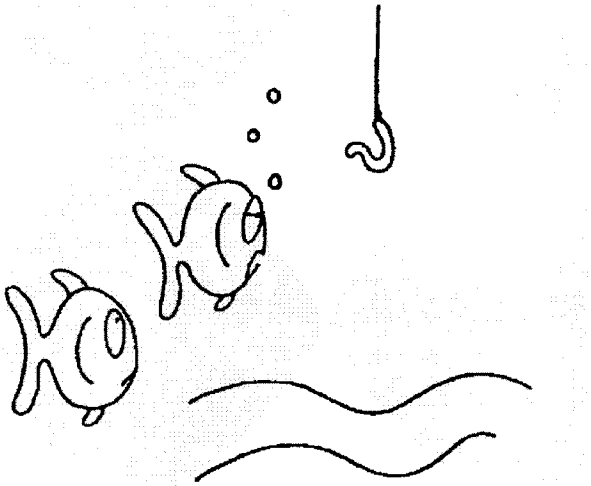
Now the hard part

Welcome news indeed was last month's unanimous Supreme Court reversal of two appeals courts' findings (*Washington* v. *Glucksberg* and *Vacco* v. *Quill*) that had endeavored to establish a constitutional right to physician-assisted suicide. But, as many observers were quick to add, and the Court itself noted, the decisions do not end the public battle over assisted suicide and euthanasia, but send it back to state legislatures and "permit this debate to continue, as it should in a democratic society." In all likelihood, the emotionally difficult and ethically subtle issues involved will be further blurred by the rough and tumble of state-by-state deliberation. But that unavoidable aspect of democratic politics should be a spur to greater involvement and clarity, not a discouragement.

Those opposed to the legalization of assisted suicide have their work cut out for them. Public opinion polls suggest that Americans generally favor a "right to die," especially if unrelieved and "pointless" pain is involved. Oregon has already legalized assisted suicide and will vote on the question again this fall. Referenda and legislative debates in other states are sure to follow. In a further and grisly reminder of how crucial informed public opinion is to protecting the dying and the psychologically vulnerable, Dr. Jack Kevorkian dispatched another willing suicide-seeker on the very day the Court announced its decisions. Kevorkian, a man no jury seems willing to convict of facilitating the deaths of dozens, many of whom were not terminally ill, has boasted that the Supreme Court ruling will "not make one damn bit of difference" as far as he's concerned.

Perhaps not. But the Court's decisions certainly will make a difference, and a positive one, when it comes to the shape and tenor of the public debate ahead. In declining to find that the Constitution guarantees a right to die or that terminally ill patients have a fundamental liberty interest in physician-assisted suicide, the Court has dramatically refused to follow the flawed logic of its abortion jurisprudence, especially *Planned Parenthood* v. *Casey* (1992). In upholding the constitutional right to abortion in *Casey*, the Court asserted that the Fourteenth Amendment protected the fundamental liberty interest of every citizen concerning "matters involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy." In formulating a right to assisted suicide in *Washington* v. *Glucksberg*, the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit merely extended the logic of *Casey* to the "problem" of dying, surely one of the "most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime." Confronted with the logical consequences of *Casey*'s loose language, the nine justices balked. The unanimous character of the decisions cannot be emphasized enough. All the justices endorsed judicial restraint in last month's rulings, cautioning against the recognition of any new constitutional rights not "deeply rooted in this nation's history and tradition" or "implicit in the concept of ordered liberty." In other words, on a question as fundamental as how we die, the Court has decided that Americans are not abstract subjects defined first by their autonomy rights, but citizens belonging to a society with a history and a moral tradition. That history and heritage should compel us to engage one another in a respectful

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"It looks good...a little **too** *good."*

COMMONWEAL IS MOVING!

July 10 we left Dutch Street.
We will be back in business on July 22.

475 Riverside Drive, Room 405,
New York, NY 10115.
Phone: (212) 662-4200.

In the meantime, visit our new website at:
http:www.commonwealmagazine.org

and honest democratic debate about "choices central to personal dignity." If our attitudes and practice concerning suicide or euthanasia are to depart from long-established religious, medical, and legal traditions—and we think they should not—at least the result will be a product of democratic deliberation, not judicial fiat.

Moreover, in eschewing much of the logic of its previous abortion rulings, the Court allows that deliberation to take place on a relatively level playing field. Americans are now free to disagree with one another about the legal status of assisted suicide and euthanasia without one side being told that it is advocating the violation of someone's constitutional rights. That should be a gratifying change for those who have rightly resisted the legacy of *Roe* v. *Wade*. But with that level playing field comes the added responsibility and burden of making opposition to medical killing as morally persuasive as possible. First, the distinction between physician-assisted suicide and withdrawing futile treatment must be vigorously defended, as in fact the Supreme Court did in rejecting the superficial reading and dismissal of that distinction by the lower courts. Second, the dangers of lowering the barrier against any direct killing must be better explained, especially the vulnerability of the poor and marginalized in a nation where more than 30 million are without health insurance. Third, as those on both sides of the issue acknowledge, comprehensive steps must be taken to improve palliative care for the dying. Effective pain management is quite feasible in all but the rarest of cases. Depression and social isolation must also be recognized as among the primary motivations behind the desire of the terminally ill to end their lives. Depression must be better diagnosed and treated, and ending the social isolation of the dying should be everyone's business.

Finally, opponents of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia should not reject out of hand the well-documented assertion that in rare circumstances the suffering of the terminally ill cannot be relieved. Catholics and other believers can draw on rich spiritual traditions that value the redemptive meaning of suffering. Not all of our fellow citizens—not even all Catholics—share this understanding. The genuine humanitarian instincts of those who have embraced various forms of euthanasia should not be belittled even if they need to be resisted. Let religious people and others opposed to physician-assisted suicide concede that these issues are not merely black and white; that in some cases we can do little but confess our helplessness. At the same time, let us continue to insist that the worst possible answer to the agonizing questions that face all of us at the end of life is to legalize a whole category of private killing.

Business Manager: *Commonweal* is looking for a new business manager, someone with promotion and business skills committed to working with a small staff and a limited budget to ensure the financial future of the magazine. Previous experience with a magazine, small business, or nonprofit organization is a plus.

The business manager will work with the staff on a wide variety of tasks. These include marketing and promotion, circulation, fund-raising, development, and general business matters, as well as supervising the business staff.

Interested applicants should send a résumé and a letter describing his or her suitability for the position and acquaintance, if any, with the magazine. Please include references and salary requirements. Four-day work week. Benefits. Readers are invited to join in our search by passing on this announcement or by letting us know of potential candidates.

Applications or suggestions should be sent to: Editor, *Commonweal*, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, N.Y. 10115.

ET CETERA

BAN THE BUN ■ According to the June 6 edition of the *National Catholic Reporter*, Mother Teresa of Calcutta has personally asked the owner of the Bongo Java coffeehouse in Nashville, Tennessee, to stop selling T-shirts, prayer cards, and mugs emblazoned with the image of a "shellacked cinnamon bun" which the faithful claim bears her likeness. Commenting to the *NCR*, the owner of Bongo Java, Bob Bernstein, at first protested, "I don't think we're doing anything in bad taste." But later, on May 22, after apparently having been shellacked himself, he backed down: "I've

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made so little money on this that there's no point [in] antagonizing anybody."

Will Mother Angelica pick up the abandoned franchise?

Paul Baumann

BREAKFAST SPECIAL

Things left behind on Dutch Street

On Thursday mornings I make a point of heading for work at a very godly hour, traveling from Manhattan's Upper West Side to the Wall Street area where *Commonweal* still (uneasily) resides. Therefore, I know that before 6 A.M. the subway cars are sparsely peopled, and you can usually find a seat next to equally drowsy early risers. This is a time of day when the city seems filled with men (most are men) in overalls, not business suits. The trip from the Upper West Side down to Dutch Street, which is nearly at the bottom of the island, can take as little as twenty minutes. And at dawn, when its streets are largely deserted and its buildings not engorging or regurgitating endless streams of people, one can feel almost in possession of Manhattan, an object usually indifferent to my attentions.

Part of my Thursday morning ritual is breakfast at a narrow diner on Fulton Street called King Donuts, just around the corner from *Commonweal*'s Dutch Street office. King Donuts' large front window features an outline of a blue neon coffee cup with the words "Worlds [*sic*] Best Coffee" set in the center in red. Like nearly everything in Manhattan, that's an exaggeration. But King Donuts, despite its worn features and gruff disposition, is a soothing place. The service, like everything in the city, is fast, the unprepossessing surroundings orderly, and the prices cheap: $3.15 for the Breakfast Special. That includes what the short-order cook calls "meat"—bacon, sausage, or ham. The seemingly makeshift grill—something of an antique—sizzles reassuringly. A small mountain of hash browns is kept warm in one corner while eggs, bacon, sausages, pancakes, and breads are thrown on the grill in dizzying succession and quickly transformed into recognizable meals. A radio is always on and always tuned to WCBS-FM, New York's "golden oldies" station. That means Elvis, the Beatles, doo-wop, the Phil Specter "sound"—a melody of postwar pop and rock 'n' roll. The counter staff, in their boxy white kitchen uniforms and black "King Donuts" baseball caps, is Hispanic. They work long hours—I have seen them there over a twelve-hour period—but seem to share a certain *esprit de corps*. The cook, who might be Greek or Italian, is the boss, and seems to speak Spanish. Short and muscular, he is as efficient as a surgeon, cracking eggs with one hand and tossing the shells into the basket under the counter behind him without looking, flipping bread into the slots of a row of toasters, and literally throwing "to go" orders ten feet down the counter to the guy manning the cash register. Everything needed to feed an army is within arm's reach, and if the place is busy the cook can display the dexterity and invention of an acrobat. During slower times he will sometimes sing along with the songs on the radio, all of which he knows by heart. He's courteous, even friendly, but not chummy.

"Regular, sir?" he will ask if I am the only person sitting at the counter. Otherwise, he prepares my breakfast—two eggs over medium, bacon, whole wheat toast, home fries, and a glass of orange juice—without our exchanging a word. He doesn't know my name, but he knows what I eat for breakfast. We are intimates. Yes, my retrograde appetites will soon make the traffic through my arteries look like the FDR Drive at rush hour. I try not to think about that. Instead, I luxuriate in the unusual feeling of being in a place where, like certain aspects of family life, wordless communication seems more the norm than an exception.

Several years ago I mustered up the courage to move from a cramped table in the windowless back room of the diner to a seat at the end of the counter. I felt as though I had finally secured a mezzanine box at the Met. King Donuts caters to cops, with their make-believe looking guns, sanitation workers in their bright orange shirts, clerical and office workers trying to steel themselves for the day ahead. Basketball, hockey, football, baseball, and last night's television shows are the common thread of the men's talk. In the fall many puzzle over weekly betting slips for the NFL games like rabbinical students over the sacred text. Copies of the *Daily News* or the *New York Post*, rarely the *Times*, preoccupy the solitary diners. Politicians come in for routine abuse, and there is an air of matter-of-fact cynicism about government, about the rich—especially overpaid professional athletes—and about the craven, but clearly coveted, lives of celebrities. Recently I overheard a contentious debate about the mean-

"Savor every morsel. You'll **never** *come across the likes of it again!"*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated August 15.

ing of the year's final episode of the "X-Files." It was virtually theological.

Women seem to like to sit at the tables in the back room, a drearily paneled space with a trap door to the diner's basement set in the middle of the floor, cumbersomely marked off by a thin iron railing. Cool-eyed complaints about the cost of clothing and food, or about children, husbands, or former husbands, are the staples of conversation here. Before the city prohibited smoking in restaurants, the air in the back room would be blue, blue with cigarette smoke and blue with the harsh, nasal accents of what are called New York's "outer" boroughs.

"How's ya sista like Staten Island?"

"She likes it."

"Yeah? We're thinkin of gettin off [Staten Island]."

"Yeah, you are?"

"We're lookin at Jersey."

"Jersey's nice."

"Yeah, we like it. But it's expensive. The houses, they're boo—da-ful."

"Yeah, but expensive."

"Vicki! You're back. Hey, you shouldn't have."

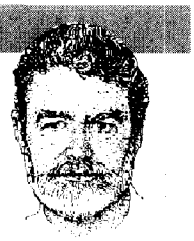
"Aggghh. Hey, you look fabulous."

"Yeah, danks."

King Donuts' coffee ain't that great, as its patrons might say, but the breakfast is, well, special. And so is the dogged everydayness of the place and the people. Now that *Commonweal* is moving to the Upper West Side, I'll miss the eggs, the "meat," and especially being called "sir." My cholesterol count, however, is certain to go down. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

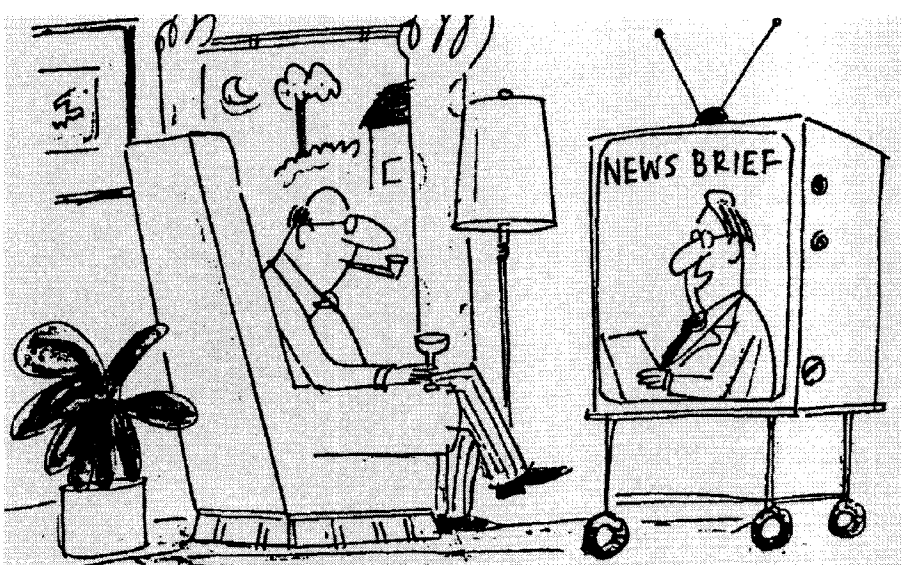
JOHN GARVEY



WHITE NOISE

Deafening roar of the trivial

Some years ago I spent five days in a monastery. No newspaper or radio or television, just rhythms of work and prayer, and the attention to both that is part of the prayer. When I came away and, hours later, heard the first "news," it was as if nothing had happened during those days. There was the same urgency in the voice of the news reader, but what he was saying was quite obviously not urgent. Why is it that, every day, I spend so much time reading the paper, listening to news, etc.?



"Today, push came to shove, all hell broke loose, the dam burst, and the garbage hit the fan. Details at eleven."

It seems responsible to do so, in some vague, civic-minded way—high school teachers always recommended it—but more likely it is the need for distraction. Don De Lillo's novel *White Noise*, years ago, suggested that death is the white noise we all know and live against and for and avoid, all at once. That novel and other books I have read since have convinced me that the best novelists, poets, and critics are more sensitive to our real climate than most theologians and philosophers, and our real climate is the one that matters most to whatever it is we mean when we talk about "spirituality," a really irritating word, much too comforting and exalted. Is escaping a burning house a matter of spirituality? Real spirituality means, among other things, seeing through a lie.

What I like about novelists and critics as varied as De Lillo, Leslie Savan, Jonathan Franzen, and George W.S. Trow is that they understand the landscape within which we try to make sense of things, and they know how that landscape has been formed to make sure that our attempts to make sense fit into the plans of other people, or conform to what some critics have called a "consensus reality." They aren't happy with this, and they try to warn us. No one likes to be called a moralist these days (though nobody objects to being called moral),

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but that's what they really are.

Leslie Savan's *The Sponsored Life* (Temple, 1995) is the best guide to seeing how advertising and television form us (I have written about it here before, February 10, 1995). One of her gifts is to point out, with convincing illustrations, the fact that the connection all of us have to advertising is one which forms and informs our entire world, not just the one we inhabit self-consciously as we watch television. In *Strong Motion* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1992), a novel too strange to describe in a few lines, Jonathan Franzen has a wonderful passage about "the system" which gains its power cumulatively. I don't want to ruin it for you, but Franzen gets at the soullessness of our time: "It's much wiser to live rationally, as a machine does. To vote for the man with the harshest views on drug kingpins. To maintain that what is real about the flavor of cinnamon is its informational content: it tells your brain—and this by sheer chemical accident, since cinnamon is non-nutritive—*eat me, I am good for you*. It's absolutely wiser to laugh at the person who tells you that without your subjective experience of cinnamon you would have hanged yourself at the age of thirteen, and that without your subjective experience of the smell of melting snow your attitude toward your mother or your wife would be no more than, *How can I make her give me what I want?*"

In 1981, George W.S. Trow's essay *Within the Context of No Context* was first published in book form. It has just been republished in paperback with a new introduction (Atlantic Monthly Press) and it is a strange, good thing to have at hand, another help to clarity, though clarity may not be the first word that comes to mind in an essay so allusive, so much like a collage of observations, epigrams, anecdotes. Trow's new introduction is as helpful in its way as the original essay was. Trow can be very funny. On TV and in particular on the particular evils of phenomena like Geraldo Rivera: "As you know, in addition to being the worst person on the face of the earth, Geraldo is just about the nicest." On celebrities and magazines: "It may be that the success of certain magazines depends upon the ability of the editors successfully to stimulate doubt, to create an atmosphere of unsureness. This is not easy. No powerful accomplishment is easy. It's not easy to get a woman to withdraw money from the bank and give it to a stranger; it's not easy to get 50 million people to think of Suzanne Somers as a beautiful young woman. In life, every powerful accomplishment is hard. Just because it's not worth doing doesn't mean it won't go wrong." It's a con, and it prevails.

One of Trow's main points is that the mediating contexts that once made life livable on a human scale have been removed, and we now have "two remaining grids in American life—the intimate grid, and the grid of 200 million." And the intimate grid is manufactured, handed to us: "Every cover of *People* says the same thing: 'This is what you love. Who can you be?'" As Trow sees it, an adolescent sensibility rules, a cold and meaningless irony: "Much advertising now lets children in on the joke, and many American babies are coming to loathe the joke."

This is not an easy book, and its style will put some people off—short captioned sections, moving around topics that don't immediately seem germane—but it works brilliantly. And it illustrates, finally, something that is true not only of our age and peculiar situation, but of all life, anywhere:

"Consider it: all transactions involving authority involve an attempt to alleviate the sense of loneliness that is a condition of life." For example, for people not to like the World's Fair of 1964-65 "was the same thing as to break the agreement that was all that stood between them and being alone....The message of many things in America is 'Like this or die.' It is a strain. Suddenly the modes of death begin to be attractive."

There is an exceedingly silly science fiction comedy called "Earth Girls Are Easy," in which aliens learn everything they need to know about how to survive in our society from a couple of hours spent in front of a television set. One of them inquires, with soulful sincerity—remembering a shampoo commercial—"Valerie, are we limp and hard to manage?" I think this is the level of most public discourse these days. As I was writing this I came across an appeal to Christians to use the media and all its ways of informing us to get the Christian message across. There are whole churches whose mission seems to be to replicate the general noise, with a Christian twist. It is too easy, even tempting, to become part of the general noise, the static that blocks the stillness within which we can begin to know the Lord...or really begin to know anything at all. Our work is not to chime in and compete, becoming part of it. We have to join the more difficult effort, and cut through. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

DON'T TEAR DOWN FENCES

First ask why they are there

In the world of real estate, everyone understands the importance of boundaries. The same is true in the world of governmental affairs, where everyone (at least almost everyone) understands the importance of paying attention to borders, not allowing unauthorized persons to cross over.

The sad experience of the Roman Empire in Western Europe is a cautionary tale. For centuries Rome did a fairly good job of protecting, at great expense, its German border; but eventually, around A.D. 400, the border defense system collapsed, and so, very largely, did the empire in the West itself.

Religions, no less than property owners and states, have to maintain boundaries if they don't want to be appropriated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or inundated by the outside world.

At some eras in history, boundary maintenance has meant that a religion, like a state, must defend a geographical territory. This was frequently so in the ancient world, when there was no separation of church and state, rarely even a differentiation between the two. The nation was a kind of church, and the national territory a precinct sacred to the gods. To lose the territory was to lose the religion.

But in the modern world—or to speak more exactly, in the world of religious pluralism that dates back to the age of great Eurasian kingdoms and empires that began with Alexander—the boundary line that divides a religion from the outside world is rarely territorial. Instead it is a line that is social, psychological, moral, doctrinal, ritualistic.

Not so long ago American Catholicism used to have an elaborate set of "boundary markers" that clearly defined the line between itself and Protestantism: Latin Masses, frequent confession, fish on Friday, rosary beads, Mary and the lesser saints, adoration of the Sacrament, Thomism, etc. That Protestants disapproved of all these things was all the more reason to cling to them. It showed where the boundary line was drawn.

But there was something un-American about all this. The dominant form of American religion for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century was *denominational* Protestantism, which was anything but enthusiastic about erecting and maintaining walls of religious separation. A broad and genial tolerance, a deep reluctance to draw boundary lines, is characteristic of the denominational mentality. In the world of Protestantism, drawing sharp boundary lines was a monopoly of the *sectarian* mentality, a mentality, found among fundamentalists, that was looked upon as narrow, illiberal, and unlovely (not to mention that such a mentality had, during the heyday of the Reformation, led to persecution and civil wars). In short, the authentic American religious mentality was the denominational mentality.

Accordingly, when Catholicism in the United States decided, at the time of Vatican II, to become fully Americanized, it accomplished this by becoming *denominationalized*, dropping many of the old boundary markers that had set Catholics apart from their Protestant fellow citizens. Latin turned into English, confession largely disappeared, you were free to eat meatballs on Friday, rosary beads grew rusty from disuse, Mary and her fellow saints were rarely attended to, adoration of the Sacrament was neglected, Thomism fell into disrepute, etc. Some of this was done with the permission of pope and bishops, some by spontaneous lay initiative. But all tended toward the same end: tearing down the wall that separated Catholicism from the outside world.

The trouble with this, as noted above, is that religions need boundaries. Neglect the boundaries of any church for a few generations, and the church will begin to wither away—a process already far advanced among Protestant denominations and visibly underway in American Catholicism.

This is not to say that a church's boundaries should never change; nor is it to say that the church must always utilize the same boundary markers. From time to time there may be good reasons for expanding or contracting boundaries, or for discarding one set of boundary markers and replacing it with another. Boundaries and markers, however, are necessities of organizational life, and woe to the church that forgets this fundamental truth.

While American Catholics in general have tended to forget this fundamental truth during the past thirty years, the most forgetful among them have been "liberal" or "progressive" Catholics, for example, the kind of people who write letters to the editor of the *National Catholic Reporter*. If the average Catholic has adopted a denominational mentality, the liberal Catholic has adopted a hyper-denominational mentality. The former favors a policy that leads to gradual ecclesiastical suicide, the latter a policy tantamount to jumping off a cliff.

"All the truly great demolition men were criticized in their own lifetime."

If fish on Friday was a minor boundary marker, the all-male, celibate character of the priesthood is a major marker, distinguishing Catholicism not only from the Protestant world but—what is more important nowadays—from the world of secularism as well. From a secularist point of view, the only thing more absurd than a priesthood is a priesthood that excludes women; and the only thing more absurd than a priesthood that excludes women is a priesthood vowed to celibacy.

My conclusion is *not* that the Catholic priesthood must therefore remain celibate and all-male. My point is, rather, that if we mean to get rid of these major boundary markers, we had better replace them with new markers that are equally effective. It would have been safer to amend the priesthood back in the pre-Vatican II days of meatless Fridays, when there were still plenty of minor markers in place. But now that we've thrown out so many of the minor markers, it becomes risky business indeed to remove the major markers as well.

Progressives who want to reform the priesthood usually talk about justice, power, and a "priest shortage." These are certainly themes worthy of consideration. But so is the need for boundaries. As long as liberal Catholics remain oblivious to this need, they mustn't be surprised when some people suspect them of not having seriously thought through the consequences of their proposals.

So here's a challenge for the priesthood reformers: Tell us what you have to offer as new boundary markers once we eliminate the all-male, celibate priesthood. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE GOOD SIDE OF GOING GLOBAL

It opens the gates to growth

Jay Mandle

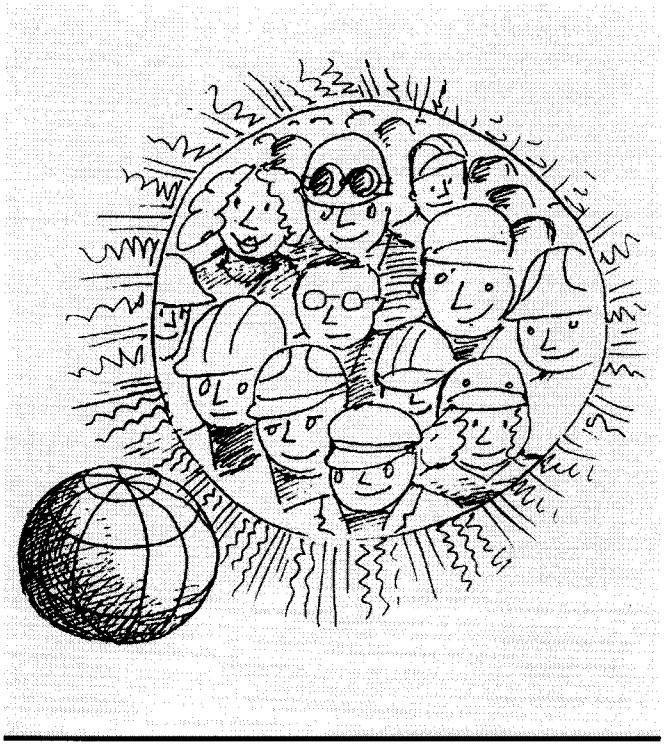
The industrial sites that are developing throughout the third world are often ugly and the wages they offer are low. Nevertheless, they symbolize a sea change in the global economy, one which has the potential to raise the living standards of millions of people in today's poor countries.

This promise exists because we live in an era when advances in technology mean that, in Lester Thurow's words, "for the first time in human history, anything can be made anywhere and sold everywhere." Because this is the case, economic development has become a real possibility for all nations throughout the world. Globalization, in short, raises the possibility that, for the first time, the mass deprivation associated with underdevelopment might dramatically be reduced, if not eliminated. This liberating outcome will not happen automatically; globalization will have to be guided to make it as inclusive as possible. Nevertheless, it is realistic to believe that dramatic inroads can now be made against the scourges that afflict humankind in the third world: malnutrition, illness, and ignorance.

The surprise is that many liberals who identify with the poor have not seen globalization in this light. Indeed, on the political left globalization is seen as a process to be opposed and reversed if possible. Antipathy to globalization, for example, is prominent in the work of analysts at the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) such as Jeff Faux, Thea Lee, and Robert E. Scott. These authors argue against the growth in international trade which has been experienced in recent years as the result of globalization, and advocate neomercantilist, if not protectionist, trade policies for the United States. In the EPI's recent book, *Reclaiming Prosperity*, Scott is remarkably cavalier in asserting that most-favored-nation trading status may have to be withdrawn from Japan and from export-oriented developing countries, and that restrictions should be imposed on investment in specified developing nations. He betrays no anxiety at all that such policies could harm both the United States and the developing world by seriously disrupting international trade.

The EPI economists adopt this stance because they believe that U.S. imports of goods from poor countries and the flow of American capital to them have depressed wage rates in this country. In adopting this position they appeal to the work of Adrian Wood who argues that unskilled workers in developed countries have been hurt by globalization. But they cite Wood only selectively. Ignored is what Wood says on the first page of his *North-South Trade, Employment, and Inequality* (Oxford, 1994): Trade "has had large benefits, raising average living standards in the North and accelerating development in the South." Ignored also is what Wood says concerning policies addressed to those hurt by the process: "The least attractive...policy response would be to raise barriers to imports from the South."

Globalization already has meant that numerous countries that formerly were considered to be "third-world nations" have become centers of modern production. South Korea, seen as an economic basket case in the 1960s, is only one of a number of Asian countries where economic growth, achieved by successfully penetrating export markets, has substantially raised the population's standard of living. To be sure, the spread of modern production has not really been global. Low-wage rates alone do not attract investment. A productive labor force, usually meaning a relatively well-educated popula-



Jay Mandle *is professor of economics at Colgate University and co-author, with Louis A. Ferleger, of* No Pain, No Gain *(A Twentieth Century Fund Paper).*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion, is needed in most cases. So is reliable infrastructure: transportation, energy, and, of course, communications. But when these are present, rapid economic growth and therefore an escape from poverty become a very real possibility. The historic fact has been that such growth is the sole mechanism by which the living standards and well-being of large numbers of people have been advanced.

The spread of economic modernization has long been associated with increased international trade. On one hand, development has permitted nations to export where previously they lacked the productive capacity to do so. On the other hand, growing incomes have permitted consumers to increase their purchases from overseas. With modernization, in the past as today, nations become increasingly important consumers and suppliers for each other. It is no surprise, therefore, that today U.S. trade with the rest of the world is growing. In just the last decade, our trade with the third-world countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America has increased from 3.7 percent of the gross domestic product to 6.8 percent.

Trade-hostile liberals like the EPI analysts have not sufficiently considered the implications of their position for the growth of these underdeveloped countries. They are silent on the question of how, in the absence of trade, wages in poor countries could be increased over the long-run. Few on the left are willing to acknowledge what the historical experience of the developed world clearly demonstrates. The only realistic way labor incomes in poor countries can increase is by creating jobs which in the first instance are poorly paid. Higher incomes for working people need to be achieved, but this is possible only to the extent that productivity growth permits it. The antitrade liberals fail to acknowledge that curtailing access to the United States market would stifle that growth.

However, the globalization of trade promises not only to raise living standards in the poor nations. It also provides benefits to the people of developed nations such as the United States. This is because trade allows U.S. consumers to buy a wider array of goods and pay lower prices than would be the case if imports were barred or minimized. In effect, trade raises incomes by reducing prices, a consideration which was all but absent in the liberal opposition to NAFTA and appears not at all in the EPI studies of the impact of trade.

Those same low prices, it is true, do pose a threat to some U.S. industries. Generally these are industries that employ poorly skilled labor. Given the relatively high cost of labor in this country, goods produced with low-productivity workers, if traded internationally, tend to cost too much to be successful in world markets. The labor force in these industries therefore finds itself in competition with lower-cost workers in poor nations, a competition which puts downward pressure on wages and incomes.

However, curtailing trade as antitrade liberalism calls for is not a satisfactory answer to the problem of defining the role of a high-wage country like the United States in the globalized economy. Nor does it represent an adequate response to the situation of low-skilled/low-wage workers in this nation. Both of these problems require recognition of the fact that, to advance our society's well-being through international trade, we must specialize in industries in which we, despite our relatively high wages, nevertheless can be successful in the market place.

When labor-intensive production methods result in products becoming over-priced, we should engage in neither protectionism nor in a race to the bottom in wages. A better alternative would be to exit from those industries and specialize in the ones where we can be successful. In general, the latter will be those in which output per worker is high. This is because high levels of labor productivity can offset the cost effects of high wages. Exporting goods produced with high quality, highly paid labor would be a means to augment sales, thereby increasing the number of high-paying jobs in this country.

Adjusting the economy in this way requires that we do a much better job in ensuring that our working people possess the skills to be successful participants in the world economy. The widely acknowledged deficiencies in our educational system threaten our ability to create and sustain high-paying employment. Especially important in this regard is job retraining for workers who are displaced by technological advances and productivity growth. Such individuals retain the potential to be highly productive and should be helped to regain their place in a structure of production that can offer them high-wage employment.

The real danger lurking in the liberal antitrade position is that it concedes precisely what we have to fight for: a supportive government committed to advancing the productive skills of the labor force and offering an adequate safety net for those who confront difficulty in the highly competitive world economy. Instead, it turns to protectionism to provide jobs and raise incomes. Aside from the impossibly high price tag associated with such a strategy (one estimate has it that the cost of trade protection per job in the United States today is $170,000), this strategy turns its back on the legitimate interests of the poor in other, less-developed nations. Rather than pitting the poor of the developed world against the poor of the third world, as protectionism does, we should be prepared to continue to fight for economic justice everywhere. If the unskilled in this country need a public-sector jobs program because private-sector employment requirements exceed their capacity, that is what we should urge. If income transfers are required to assist the needy, that is what we should argue for. What we should not do is turn a blind eye to the needs of the poor elsewhere, something that is implicit in denying the developing world access to our markets.

Obviously there should be limits to what is acceptable when the United States purchases goods from poor countries. We should not import goods produced by children or by workers who labor in demonstrably unsafe conditions. We should

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

also ban the imports of products whose production processes contravene internationally negotiated environmental protections. But great care must be exercised in imposing such restrictions. The advocacy by Americans of trade sanctions to reshape labor and environmental policies in other countries risks a politically distasteful coercion. Our technological and environmental expertise should be made available where they are desired. The same is true with regard to our labor unions' assisting organizing efforts elsewhere. But such efforts must never represent impositions on unwilling societies.

Economic development in the third world is not the enemy of the well-being of the American people. Neither is the international trade associated with that development. But it is true that in today's international economy, in which low-income countries are emphasizing trade as the means to escape poverty, for U.S. workers to earn high and rising wages we will have to specialize in high productivity industries. Doing so requires an activist government, supportive of technological advance while at the same time compassionate about the human costs of that process. Better than we have in the past, we will have to reform our educational system to make certain that our workers can compete at the highest levels of productivity. At the same time we will have to recognize the interests and needs of those who are not successful participants in the process. In these ways, globalization can be harnessed to the task of extending the benefits of development internationally without dangerously pitting the people of the developed world against those of the third world. □

Poems

Robert C. Jones
The Boys of Summer

The boys of summer
sprawl on the yard
or on butterfly chairs
at the corner of Warren and Market,
taking their ease
in the afternoon sun
and smelling the smell of new grass.

The philosopher Chuang Tzu
has said: "You
cannot speak of ice
to an insect of summer—
the creature of a season."

The boys of summer
are bare-footed,
shirtless. They loll
in the warmth of the sun.
They play their guitars
and they smoke their cigars.

Chuang Tzu, clothed in ice,
shakes his head.

William John Watkins
Distant Cries

God grant the youthful lovers time to mount
the cliffs that rise above them like a flame.
Although they hold the Drop of no account,
they turn back far below the peaks we claim.

I do not mock them just because they crawl
the foothills planting flags on every peak
and crying out "Excelsior!" on all
the minor crags that fall to their technique.

They've seen our pitons rising overhead
nailed in a ragged line toward the snow,
up sheerfaced cliffs they stare toward with dread.
Who can believe it was so long ago

we clambered to those mountaintops sublime,
and fell far further than the rest can climb.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TO END SWEATSHOPS

Workers' rights in a global economy

Robert A. Senser

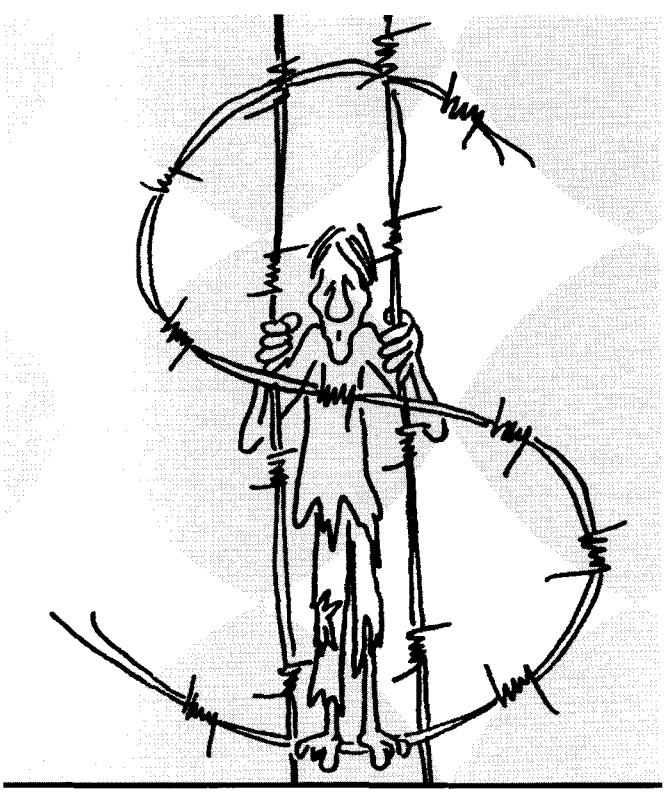
In its 1997 world survey, Human Rights Watch indicts Western democracies for abandoning their human-rights commitments in favor of trade and investment opportunities in countries like China, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia. But the report sees a bright spot, an emerging countervailing trend. As the organization's 1997 report puts it, the global economy is creating "new and immediate connections among distant people," and is thereby spawning "a surprising new source of support for the human-rights cause" among ordinary citizens in the United States, Canada, and Europe.

The report pinpoints the motives behind this growing popular support: "Because the goods purchased in one country may be produced by victims of repression in another, the very act of consumption can be seen as complicity in that repression—unless steps are taken to ensure that manufacturing is free of labor-rights abuse." To avoid that personal complicity, many consumers "are insisting on guarantees that they are not buying the products of abusive labor conditions." In other words, they don't want to be a party to subsidizing sweatshops.

How to provide reliable guides against such complicity? It's far from easy. In the early 1990s Levi Strauss, Reebok, and a few large importers of garments and other goods developed codes of labor practices for their contractor firms, almost all located overseas. Some other multinationals followed, each with its own emphasis in listing abusive practices that it would not tolerate.

In an article on the Levi Strauss code, which was the most thorough at the time, a *Business Week* headline (August 1, 1994) asked: "Is Levi Strauss's approach visionary—or flaky?" Its flakiness was beyond question in the mind of David L. Lindauer, professor of economics at Wellesley College and a World Bank consultant. He called sweatshop conditions such as child labor normal in early stages of economic development, and advised against any kind of intervention, even by voluntary codes of conduct (*Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1993). But the media intervened in its own way, peeking into distant factories and bringing shocking scenes of human exploitation into Western living rooms. Even some name-brand companies with codes of conduct found themselves the subject of labor horror stories on national TV. Pressures mounted to such a point in 1996 that then Secretary of Labor Robert Reich persuaded President Bill Clinton to appoint a task force—formally called a "Partnership"—of leaders from business, labor, human-rights, religious, and consumer organizations to look at sweatshop problems that centered on the apparel industry.

At a White House ceremony last April 14, Clinton gave his quasi-official seal of approval to the partnership's seven-page action report, the result of seven months of negotiations. The centerpiece is a code of conduct designed to eradicate sweatshop conditions in apparel workplaces producing for the U.S. market. The code blends elements of existing individual codes—no employment of children under fourteen, a maximum workweek of sixty hours, a ban on harassment and abuse, no forced labor, and so on—and outlines a voluntary, two-tiered monitoring system, one performed by companies, the other by independent external monitors. The Partnership Agreement, Clinton said, "will significantly reduce the use of sweatshop labor over the long



Robert A. Senser *edits "Human Rights for Workers," a Web page at http://www.senser.com.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

run. It will give American consumers greater confidence in what they buy."

Seven U.S. activists with first-hand knowledge of sweatshop labor overseas reacted negatively; they issued a joint press release denouncing the agreement as flawed. Others who are just as concerned about the problem called it a historic "breakthrough." Both the positive and the negative assessments are correct.

On the positive side: Nike, Reebok, Liz Claiborne, L.L. Bean, Patagonia, Nicole Miller, and other leaders of the industry (really a group of overlapping industries) have publicly signed on to a document in which they:

- recognize the human problems that afflict large parts of their industry; and
- accept responsibility for a new approach to assuring "humane and decent working conditions" in the factories of their countless contractors and subcontractors throughout the world.

No other significant group of leaders of a global industry has made such a commitment. Thus, the decision announced at the White House on April 14 is indeed historic. As one participant, union leader Jay Mazur, pointed out, it is a "first step," one as advanced as possible at the present time. It won editorial praise from both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Yet what good will the agreement do where it counts: in the lives of the millions of women, children, and men who make the shirts, dresses, pajamas, shoes, and other things we wear? In the opinion of some who know the historic habits of this industry first-hand, codes of conduct are often just a fig leaf for doing business as usual. Indeed—let's be realistic— the Partnership Agreement could turn out as nothing more than a PR shot in the arm for the various brand names represented at the April 14 ceremony.

A fact of life not mentioned in the agreement is that most of the workers in export-oriented factories in Asia and Latin America are young women. To these female workers, this code provision is especially meaningful: "No employee shall be subject to any physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal harassment or abuse." Such abuse by supervisors and managers is shockingly widespread and takes many forms. In an incident on March 14 in Vietnam, for example, fifty-six women who had not worn the proper shoes to work were forced to run around their Nike factory again and again until twelve of them collapsed under a hot sun and were taken to a hospital emergency room. Though Nike claims that such episodes are isolated, they at the very least indicate a need for proper training.

A new study by Peter Hancock, a researcher at the Center for Development Studies at Edith Cowan University in Australia, also illustrates that need. He found that at a Nike plant in rural Indonesia, supervisors get special instruction in how to discipline women workers. The skills include use of abusive language such as, "Move, you stupid bitch," and, "Fuck you." Unfortunately, the White House agreement requires training on the code's standards only for code monitors, who will necessarily be few in number, not for managers and supervisors, the individuals most directly responsible for implementing the code.

Physical and psychological violence, and the threat of such violence, require priority attention, not just because of the wrongs done to individuals (though that is reason enough for action) but because of their use as management tools to instill fear into the whole work force and thus keep it in tight control. It is a basic weapon to inhibit worker demands for the "decent and humane working conditions" laid down in the new code.

In its language about unions, the industry agreement is more specific than are most of the already existing individual codes. "Employers shall recognize and respect the right of employees to freedom of association and collective bargaining," it declares. Further, it urges companies to "consult periodically with legally constituted unions representing employees at the work site regarding the monitoring process."

But there is far less here than the wording suggests. Most of the industry's production is concentrated in China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and other countries in which the government systematically represses the twin right to organize and to bargain. By firing or otherwise punishing union members, a management on its own can ordinarily crush any employee initiative to unionize; but if the "troublemakers" become too numerous, the government can usually be counted on to apply force from the police and even the military. In such countries, the advice about consulting "legally constituted unions" is empty, since such organizations are controlled either by the government or management, or both. Even using the term "collective bargaining" can bring harsh reprisals in China. A Beijing factory worker named Zhou Guoqiang prepared a T-shirt with the Chinese lettering for collective bargaining and was secretly sentenced to three years in a labor camp on a charge of printing T-shirts with "slogans calculated to incite."

The wide range of such human-rights violations in China led to Levi Strauss's 1993 decision to phase out its operations in the People's Republic. "I can't figure it out," a reporter in Hong Kong was told by a Nike executive wondering why Levi Strauss would abandon such a large market. The *Wall Street Journal* article (May 5, 1993) that reported the decision and industry reactions was headlined: "Levi Strauss, Leaving China, Passes Crowd of Firms Going the Other Way."

The attraction behind this mass movement, which has accelerated since 1993, is multifaceted. Low wages form one of China's attractions, as in other countries where the apparel industry farms out its production. The new code does not diminish that attraction, since, instead of calling for a living wage, it settles for respecting the "minimum wage required by local law," which is uniformly low and, even then, often unenforced in China and elsewhere.

But the attraction is not limited to low wages. Another

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is the freedom to impose long working hours. The code sets a sixty-hour week maximum but adds an escape clause: permission for still longer hours "in extraordinary business circumstances." Ironically, sixty hours is higher than the legal maximums set in China and in some other countries, but no matter: The countries' statutory requirements are seldom enforced. Also, "extraordinary business circumstances" occur often enough to justify extraordinarily long working hours, sometimes twenty-four hours or more straight through.

Another attraction is that factory health and safety regulations are weak and almost never enforced, despite sky-high death and injury rates in China and other "miracle" economies. In one disaster publicized within China in early 1996, at least two women workers died, and more than thirty were stricken with leukemia and anemia, by inhaling toxic fumes from benzene and other chemicals in poorly ventilated foreign-owned shoe factories in the coastal province of Fujian. ("Lambs led to slaughter," a woman's magazine in Beijing reported in its exposé.) The new code's call for a "safe and healthy working environment" could help some of China's shoe workers, who include 230,000 women in Fujian alone. But the code has no implementation deadlines, and so Gerard Greenfield of the Asian Monitor Resource Center, a fact-finding nongovernmental group in Hong Kong, asks: "How long will it take to stop benzene poisoning? A year? By that time there will be permanent damage to the women who work with it at least sixty hours a week."

The brutal truth is that change will not come quickly. The present system of exploiting the most vulnerable workers is widely dispersed and deep rooted; it is protected by the self-interest of elites accruing incredible economic and political benefits from it, and bolstered by rationalizations often similar to those that perpetuated slavery and racial segregation. Although the Partnership Agreement may produce some early improvements here and there, it is limited to one industry headquartered in one country, and even within that industry some big players have yet to join. The hold-outs will ponder questions such as: "What about Canadian, European, and Japanese

The lure of American jobs

Like many indigenous residents from the highlands of Oaxaca, Mexico, Valentin Cortez Yilabe has a short-legged physique that makes his head seem too large for his shoulders. His heavy-lidded eyes have a sad milky tint and his wide mouth pulls his mustache into a drooping petulance.

I first, met Cortez when I stopped to buy a soft drink at a *miscelánea* among a cluster of stone and sheet-metal dwellings a few miles from Oaxaca City. As we talked, the forty-one-year-old Cortez stood with his hands shoved into the pockets of his handmade jeans. One pants leg was tucked into the top of a heavy work boot, the other hung loose. From the dwelling behind him, a wide, low rectangular structure built of loosely mortared adobe bricks, children and grandchildren, most of them girls in frayed but scrubbed white dresses and white cotton sweaters, peered shyly at us before scurrying away to do little chores that a beldam inside was assigning them.

Cortez had grown up in a beautiful small *poblado* named San Ysidro Alaopan, perched "in the clouds" above the rain forests, a tortuous five-hour drive north of Oaxaca City. There, in a sloping clearing, sixty or seventy families raised maize and herded goats around their bunched houses, single store, and little church. For centuries they had lived in virtual isolation, seldom entertaining any visitors and marrying each other's children. Rarely did any of them leave until drought and a fungus destroyed several successive crops of maize and forced some of the men to seek work on lower land acreages.

Cortez remembers the day that one of the villagers returned after a year's absence. "Come with me," he told Cortez and others. He showed them the new clothes he was wearing, a wallet thick with *pesos*, and told them there were good jobs waiting for them "on the other side." "Leave your women, come!" he urged them. "In a few months you will have enough to buy everything that you need and you can come back to your families."

"I believed him," said Cortez. "After all, he was a cousin, from the village. He said his *jefe* was holding fifty jobs. Our crops already were wilting. Even the goats couldn't find enough to eat. So I said, 'Yes, I will go.'" A few days later the cousin returned with two men and a truck. "We had to walk to the highway [about four miles] to get into it because the truck could not climb the road to our *rancheria*."

Carrying only their *sarapes* and a little to eat, they climbed into the back of the truck. "There were so many of us crowded together that we could barely sit down. We drove for days. The truck stopped only to let us urinate. When the driver would slam on the brakes, we all would crash forward, into one another. And we would bang into one another when the truck went too fast around a curve. Some of the younger men were frightened. They had never gone so fast or so far away before. One said we would never get out of the truck. Others said we would never get back to our homes, ever again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

companies? What will they do?" Even with the best of intentions and diligence, reform of sweatshops will be piecemeal if industries in other countries fail to get religion.

The global dimension of this problem makes it very easy to shrug off personal responsibility. It is a long way between the foreign workplaces making, say, sport shoes and the stores selling them. Across these two points stretches a complex series of relationships—among contractors, subcontractors, local governments, Asian conglomerates, U.S. corporate headquarters, bankers, boards of directors, stockholders, buyers for retail stores, and many other intermediaries—each with priorities that crowd out concern for those making the shoes. As sovereigns, governments like China's should, of course, be responsible for enforcing their own laws, but when they show signs of doing so they hear business threats to move elsewhere.

Still, it need not be so. Despite a long chain of relationships, traversing many borders and vast seas, people in the industry do somehow manage to work together to assure the quality of shoes. Couldn't they also work together to assure the quality of life of shoe workers?

A strong "yes" assumption underpins the work, present and future, of the Apparel Industry Partnership. For that it deserves encouragement from all sides. The next several months are crucial. During that time the partnership is to set up a permanent association to carry out its work. It must decide exactly how to label products made in compliance with the new code. It must bring into its ranks the many U.S. firms still on the outside. It must at the same time actively encourage similar partnerships in kindred industries in Canada, Europe, and Japan; otherwise its work will not be sustainable over the long run.

The U.S. government has an indispensable role—giving the partnership the same imaginative support provided last year under the leadership of then Secretary of Labor Reich. His successor, Alexis M. Herman, has made a public commitment to do so. In a May 30 address at a Marymount University conference on sweatshop solutions, she said: "We must relegate sweatshops to the history books." That in no way diminishes the need for consumers and worker-rights advocates to maintain pressure on all who share complicity in repression. □

"We drove for three days, maybe four. Then we stopped to spend the night in an abandoned warehouse, and the next day *coyotes* took small groups of us across the border. On 'the other side,' another truck picked us up and took us to a ranch. They locked us in a large room. We did not know where we were, but we were so tired we all lay down. Hardly had we gotten to sleep when men came through to wake us. They had us take showers and a man with an electric device shaved our heads. They said it was for 'sanitary purposes,' but I think it was to embarrass us. They gave us tortillas and coffee, wrote down our names, and told us it was time to go to work.

"None of us had worked in fields like that before, tilling and cutting flowers and cutting and tying eucalyptus leaves. We suffered from the heat. Every day the *jefes* woke us before daybreak and we worked until dark. At noon they would bring tortillas and beans to the fields so we could eat. When we got off work, they would drive us to the *casa grande* and check off our names. Then we would line up and get food to take back to the building in which we lived.

"All round the grounds of the *casa grande* there was barbed wire. Behind our building was a little building made of cinder blocks where the *jefes* would lock up anyone they wanted to punish.

"Why were we punished? For many things—tearing a bag, or fighting, or taking too much time for lunch. One night, two of the young men dug a hole under the barbed wire. I don't know what happened to them.

"We knew when it was Saturday night because that's when we got paid. Otherwise, we did not know what day it was. The *jefe* who gave out the money had a paper on each one of us. On it was written how many meals we had eaten, how many other things we had bought. We could not buy anything, even a cigarette or a *petate*, except from one of the *jefes*. They said we owed money for our transportation from San Ysidro Alaopan, and took out for that. At the end of three weeks, I had only about eleven dollars. Some had even less than that.

"I worked there for six months, but had only $110 to bring back with me to Oaxaca. I had not been able to send any money to my family during all that time. I would have left, but I did not know where I was—or how to get back—and some of the workers said that if the *migra* caught us, they would beat us or throw us in jail and take the little bit of money that we had left.

"Out of the money that I earned, I also had to pay my way back to Oaxaca. When I got home to San Ysidro Alaopan, I was embarrassed and ashamed to see how much my family had suffered. Even so, the following year, when the *patrón*'s henchman came back, many from the village went with him again. They worked so hard to earn so little, but still it was more than they could make staying home."

I looked at Cortez's sad eyes and understood.

ROBERT JOE STOUT

Robert Joe Stout lives in Chico, California. He is writing a book on Mexico.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Richard Alleva

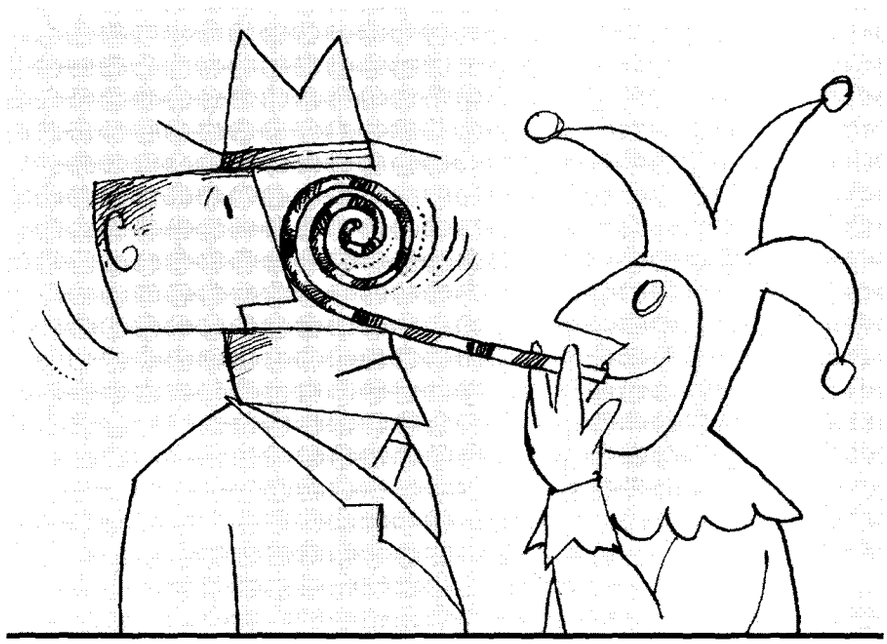
SATIRE AIN'T FAIR

'Citizen Ruth'

Citizen Ruth, released last month on video and laser disk, does what any genuine satire must do: It offends our sensibilities for the sake of morality. Its creators, Alexander Payne (writer-director) and Jim Taylor (cowriter) aren't deterred by political correctness or good taste or even a sense of fair play. Since *Citizen Ruth*—ostensibly a story about the abortion controversy—doesn't take a prolife or prochoice stand, it has been contemptuously labeled as the "prototypical apolitical film" (*Film Comment*); in other words, a phony. But satire has an obligation only to be moral, not political. The evil indicted by this movie is neither baby killing nor the curtailment of women's rights. Instead, Payne and Taylor are indicting blindness: the moral and psychological blindness that comes to those who, hating in the cause of compassion or justice, become besotted by loathing of their adversaries.

Under the opening credits we hear the Frank Sinatra standard, "All the Way." When somebody loves you, it's no good unless they love you...*all* the way. But who could so radically love Ruth Stoops? Pregnant with her third unwanted baby, she swills down beer and whiskey, rents her body to no-accounts, and gets high on aerosol sprayed into plastic bags. A prosecutor is ready to indict her for reckless endangerment of her fetus but a judge is willing to dismiss the charge if she gets an abortion. Bedraggled, self-pitying, utterly selfish, and semilobotomized by drugs, Ruth is the apotheosis of White Trash. *Love* Ruth Stoops? *All* the way? C'mon.

Well, maybe the Stoneys can. They're members of the Baby-Savers, a prolife group. They're willing to take Ruth into their home, feed and clothe her, and provide her with all obstetrical aid. Yes, they're willing to love Ruth Stoops...as long as she serves their cause by embarrassing the judge (a longtime foe of theirs) who urged her to have an abortion.



Or perhaps Rachel and Diane, prochoicers who "rescue" Ruth from the Baby-Savers, can love our heroine? Certainly, they give her all the comforts of their country house, feed her macrobiotically, replace the cornball maternity T-Shirt the Stoneys gave her with a Frida Kahlo silkscreened blouse, and teach her to chant to "our mother, the moon"; but they too have an agenda. Since Ruth's case has caught the attention of national media, she must, *must* send a strong message out there on the airways that a woman's choice can't be bought. And, of course, there's really only one choice that affirms free choice, right?

What both groups have in common is their blindness, perhaps even fundamental indifference, toward the needy, amoral, untamable, and rebarbative piece of humanity that Ruth is. All are so caught up with what she represents that they can't truly know her, much less love her.

For instance, when their guest regales them with one of the many horror stories from her squalid sex life, an anecdote of orgy culminating in self-mutilation, the Stoneys think it enough to shush Ruth politely so that her words don't reach the ears of their fascinated eight-year-old son. But the sexual rage in Ruth can't be shushed or lulled by hymns or healed by outdoor cookouts. The Stoneys are like surgeons trying to close gunshot wounds with scotch tape.

But the prochoicers outside the Stoneys' dining-room window shouting out warnings about brainwashing seem just as purblind. What their eyes encounter is a girl picking at her food, but they scream and carry on as if they were witnessing a torture session. Are they crazy? wonders Ruth. Yes, they are, affirms Mr. Stoney, as he routs the prochoicers with a shotgun, all the while looking pretty crazy himself.

This blindness toward Ruth is an extension of the myopia her supporters have *vis-à-vis* their own lives. The Stoneys can't see that their own daughter is sneaking out of the house at night for booze and boyfriends, and Mr. Stoney can't perceive that Blaine Gibbons, the great media honcho of prolifers, is a pederast with a thirteen-year-old cata-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mite in his entourage. And in the other camp the goddess-worshiping, granola lesbians, Diane and Rachel, don't permit themselves to know that the semipsychotic Viet vet they use as a bodyguard is pounding prolifers into pulp right in their farmhouse cellar.

Yes, this movie is unfair. Virtually no high-minded feminists employ thugs, and I presume that scarcely any fundamentalist superstars are pederasts. But satire isn't fair; it is purposefully unfair. It uses exaggeration to get at the least palatable truths. At their very worst, prolifers are so possessed by the ecstasy of accusation that they do indeed wink at the evils in their movement. (Think of those prolife spokesmen who have refused to condemn the murders of abortionists.) At their very worst, prochoicers, though wielding words instead of chains, can be as brutally exclusionary as any lethal motorcycle gang. (Why do so few women who oppose abortion feel comfortable calling themselves feminists, though they may agree with the movement's other ideas?)

Aesthetically, satirists tend to be classicists drawn to neat parallels in their storytelling. Thus, in *Citizen Ruth* both sides use thuggish Viet vets. If the Stoneys chant Protestant hymns at Ruth's bedside, Diane and Rachel chant on their porch while their intended protégée looks on like a bemused pet dog. If Burt Reynolds as the celebrity prolifer leads his troops in an automotive convoy, Tippi Hedren as a celebrity prochoicer descends on the battlefield in a helicopter—a veritable *dea ex machina*. And so forth. These symmetries don't take on a ticktock predictability but are woven into the fast-paced comic action.

The staging, too, is classical in its dry wit and avoidance of vulgar emphases. When Mr. Stoney holds a press conference, the dead-pan silence of skeptical reporters is subtly amplified by the quiet swish-swish-swish of a manual vacuum cleaner operated by a maid in the back of the room. As Mr. Stoney says grace at the family barbecue, his voice is drowned out by jet planes, the barking of dogs, the motors of lawnmowers. The abundance of American suburbia is overwhelming this poor man even as he tries to thank God for it.

Laura Dern's performance as Ruth is an adroit balancing act that keeps repulsiveness and pathos in perfect equipoise. Swoosie Kurtz as Diane and Kurtwood Smith as Stoney inject these fanatics with just enough humanity to keep us from dismissing them as monsters. (This dismissibility was the fatal flaw of *To Die For*.) The whole cast is commendable except for Burt Reynolds, who substitutes one-dimensional thuggishness for the oleaginous grandiosity that Blaine Gibbons should project (and that Charlton Heston would have radiated effortlessly).

The very wit and urbane puckishness that writers Payne and Taylor bring to this movie and that make it so good also, at times, lead the filmmakers into the only sort of favoritism this film exhibits. Though the film skewers fanaticism and self-deception on both sides of the struggle, Payne and Taylor seem to add a few grains of gunpowder in undermining the prolife camp. I think this reflects a cultural bias rather than a moral tilt. The poor Stoneys, with their plastic "praying hands" aglow in the guest room, their cholesterol-rich barbecues, their graceless way of dressing (clip-on ties, "cute" maternity T-shirts), and even more graceless way with the English language, may not be fundamentally more ridiculous than the neopagan feminists chanting to the moon, but they are more unsightly. The camera is kinder to sleek pagans than to dowdy fundamentalists, or so it must seem to the college-educated people who constitute most of *Citizen Ruth*'s audience. The greater part of this film's satire is right on target, but when it lampoons the Stoneys for how they live as well as for what they do, a note of snobbery is sounded. If the feminists are the Laputans of this movie—like Swift's scholars, they are ridiculously high-minded and self-regarding—the Stoneys and their cohorts are *Citizen Ruth*'s Yahoos. And it was the Yahoos who elicited Swift's most visceral contempt and the withdrawal of Gulliver from the human race.

But, let's say it again, satirists aren't fair. □

MEDIA

Frank McConnell

A KILLER SERIAL

Chris Carter's 'Millennium'

As I write, we are coming to the end of the 1996-97 TV season in which the most arresting new series was "Millennium," on the Fox Network. "Millennium" not only survived the Nielsen wars, more remarkably, it survived its own, initial, all-but-guaranteed success. And, as if that weren't enough, it became a genuinely good show.

"Millennium" is the creation of producer Chris Carter, whose "X-Files" has by now become an indelible reference-point of contemporary popcult ("X-Files" calendars, "X-Files" conventions, an "X-Files" movie in the works, and an overcrowded "X-Philes" chat room on the Internet). When "Millennium" premiered, Fox even gave it the traditional "X-Files" time slot—Friday night at 9 P.M. E.S.T.—bumping its established older sib to Sunday. And, before the first episode was shown, it was hyped, on the tube, in the trades, even on the backs of comic books.

Now that sort of buildup can be, and often is, a recipe for disaster. As the *New Yorker* observed, the "X-Files" began unobtrusively and built a cult following before exploding into the shared mythology it now, undeniably, is. "Millennium," on the other hand, was being celebrated as a major début before anyone outside the Fox bunker had *seen* the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing. And when I saw it, that first Friday, all atwitter with anticipation, I turned to my wife and said, with all the authority of a media critic, "This won't last a month."

So I was wrong: So sue me. But let me explain how *right* I was to be wrong.

Here's the setup. Frank Black (Lance Henriksen—remember the good-guy android in the movie *Alien*?) is an ex-cop, F.B.I. agent, whatever, living in Seattle—that most squeaky-clean and boring of American cities—in a nice house with his nice wife Catherine, a social worker, their cloyingly nice young daughter, Jordan, and—natch—their dog.

The problem is, Frank's not quite right in the head. He quit his job because he had a breakdown, and his breakdown was because he could, somehow, *see* in his mind's eye the commission of the most awful crimes by serial killers. Is it ESP? Or is it that Frank somehow shares the seething, maggoty impulses of the men he should track down?

At any rate, he's moved to Seattle. But he's also joined a group calling itself Millennium: a group of free-lance investigators, consultants, and, yes, psychics dedicated to tracking and stopping serial killers.

That's the setup; here's the hook. The Millennium group has been formed because, as the world approaches the apocalyptic year 2000, unknowable but undeniable occult forces are urging the human race toward an orgy of self-slaughter. Millennium is dedicated to resisting, insofar as it can, the blood-dimmed tide of the end of the age. Every week, then, Frank is summoned by the group to track down another serial killer, while also trying, twitchy and all-but-affectless fellow that he is, to maintain something like a normal life with wife, kid, dog.

Now you understand my skepticism. A series where, week after week, a sensitive locates a murderer? How many variations can you play on *that* one-chord theme? It's like the old Perry Mason series: every episode the same situation, the same courtroom drama, the same breakdown-on-the-witness-stand climax: TV as the coma-state of alpha waves.

What makes "Millennium" different—and vastly better—is its tang of brimstone. Occult forces driving us all to chaos? Somewhere in heaven, H.P. Lovecraft is smiling. Producer Chris Carter is a master connoisseur and purveyor of digestible paranoia: Each episode of "X-Files" begins with the legend, either "trust no one," or "the truth is out there." In "Millennium" Carter raises the ante: Each episode opens with three phrases: "Wait." "Worry." "Who Cares?"

They are a mantra of urban dread: of the citizens who watch from their suburban houses while a girl is beaten to death in the cul-de-sac, and don't even think to call 911; of our sense that something has gone terribly wrong and *we can't fix it.*

So who can?

This is a great age for serial killers—not in fact, but in fiction. Think about Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs.* Think about David Fincher's brilliant, influential film, *Seven.* Think about the fact that most of the best-selling detective novels these days are ones about serial slayers. Why?

I think it's because the idea of the serial killer has something to do with our sense of the astonishing fragility of our carefully constructed "normal" lives. Husband, wife, kid, dog: At any moment, that delicate equation—even in shiny Seattle—can be shattered all too easily.

Not that it really will be. The Jon Benet Ramsays of the world are, thank God, few. The important thing is our sense that it could. Forget Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" of 1841. It was in 1887, in *A Study in Scarlet,* that Arthur Conan Doyle invented, at the same time, urban dread in the form of the serial killer and Sherlock Holmes, supreme rationalist, as his inevitable adversary. (The next year, 1888, remarkably saw the advent of the patron saint of urban dread, Jack the Ripper.)

Carter's Frank Black is an heir of Doyle's Holmes. Not as rational—who at the tail end of this century *could* be as rational as Holmes?—and not nearly as assured, he is nevertheless committed to maintaining the solidarity of love against the vile forces who both attack him and whose seduction he feels. He is a splendid neurotic, splendidly portrayed by Henriksen.

"Millennium," then—at least if you watch it the way I do—isn't finally about serial killers at all. It's about—and it's a heartening antidote to—our *real* fear that present happiness may not last. That anxiety may grow as we approach the year 2000, but that anxiety is always there anyhow.

And watching Frank Black overcome it every Friday night may not be a solution, but it is bracing. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Velcro man meets Teflon story

The Gospel according to the Son
Norman Mailer
Random House, $22, 242 pp.

Jack Miles

What is the opposite of a Teflon personality? A Velcro personality? Whatever it is, Norman Mailer seems to have it. Even when he has committed no outrage, outrage somehow adheres to him.

What distinguishes *The Gospel according to the Son*, Mailer's new retelling of the gospel story, is not its offensiveness but, as Reynolds Price gently pointed out in the *New York Times Book Review*, its lack of invention. Though this book is being sold as a novel, it differs only somewhat from a *diatessaron*, a harmony of the four canonical Gospels. The Virgin Birth is still a virgin birth. The miracles are still miracles. Many of the words of Jesus are quoted verbatim from the Gospel texts. There are no conspiratorial scandals in the passion and death. Mailer retains even the phrase, "His blood be upon us and upon our children." The Resurrection itself comes off right on schedule. In short, there is little to disturb a conservative Christian here. By the same token, there is little to engage anyone who owns a Bible.

Whence then the foaming outrage on the part of so many reviewers? Price has been more the exception than the rule. Given the absence of sensationalism in the narration, most reviewers have hung their indignation on the fact that Mailer makes his *diatessaron* a Jesus-*pseudepigraph*; that is, a first-person account in the feigned voice of Jesus. As a literary device, this may or may not work, but if it is an affront to good taste, it is scarcely an unprecedented affront.

No outrage, I note, has greeted the use of essentially the same device by Neale Donald Walsch in the mawkish *Conversations with God* (Putnam), which was riding high on the best-seller list well before *The Gospel according to the Son* arrived and still is. None greeted the publication, some months ago, of another first-person narration in a feigned divine voice, Franco Ferrucci's *The Life of God (as Told by Himself)* (Chicago).

Ferrucci makes a particularly instructive contrast, for his retelling of the gospel (which constitutes, for him, only a chapter in God's long life) is full of picaresque, sometimes grotesque invention. Thus, he makes the words "Let this cup pass from me" refer literally to the cup with which a deranged Jesus is drinking himself into oblivion. As Son explains to Father, shortly before the Last Supper, in a voice "hoarse with wine and dejection,"

> I will have to get them to crucify me so as to be remembered. I could very well avoid it, but I have no choice if I want to save at least a part of what I have preached. And I began to lie a long time ago. I know very well that neither hells nor paradises exist, but this evening at supper I will give a special speech about the final judgment, which will never take place, and they will believe me. What else can I do?

In despair over his deluded son, God wanders the streets, gets drunk himself, and "end[s] up in bed with a girl, on whose breast I caught myself crying out the name of Mary Magdalene, before submerging again in sleep."

Porca miseria! But...is this not *just* the sort of wretched excess that the literati were predisposed to expect from Mailer? They didn't get it. The point can scarcely be overstressed. *He didn't do it.* But they reacted as if he had done it. It is at such moments that one sees reputation somehow taking on a life of its own, becoming a hypostasis, almost an incarnation, toward which anger or devotion may be directed irrespective of what the historical personage is actually about down here on Earth.

The Gospel according to the Son is, as to its content, a mild, almost deferential Bible story in which Jesus has no vices of any kind and, notably, no sex life whatsoever beyond a vaguely turbulent dream or two in boyhood. On the last page of this Bible story, we are still waiting for the Mailer of uproarious legend to show up, the Mailer who might have written—but hasn't—*The Gospel according to Judas*. What comes through instead, beating like a drum so loud it drowns out the orchestra, is the familiar gospel story itself. That "material," to speak as novelists speak, dominates this writer; the writer does not dominate the material. I do not mean to say that more invention in the Ferrucci vein would have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

made for a better book. The risks, the purely literary risks, in writing with imaginative elaboration or revision a story that your readers already know so well, are large unless all you are aiming at is comedy in the Monty Python (*The Life of Brian*) or Gore Vidal (*Live from Golgotha*) manner. Their kind of comic target is easy to hit precisely *because* their readers already know the story so well. Parody is always funnier if you know the original. Unfortunately, if you are not writing comedy, there are risks in failing to invent as well as in inventing.

What goes for the contents of *The Gospel according to the Son* goes also for the style, though I find the style far and away the most memorable feature of the book. Groans have been groaned over the quasi-biblical diction Mailer devises for his Jesus-narrator, but consider the problem to which that diction is the solution. Once Mailer chose to write in the person of Jesus, he had to write in language that would not depart entirely from what his readers remember of the language of Jesus. To do otherwise would be to risk unintentional comedy. Played in earnest, this "further words of" game is almost impossible to win if only because success, when it does come, comes by the total suppression of an author's own voice. Mailer makes things particularly difficult for himself by requiring Jesus not just to utter some new utterances but to play the role of evangelist and tell the whole story. The whole text has to come out of his mouth. What style can possibly work for that?

The style he comes up with has been approvingly characterized by no less a critic than Frank Kermode as "*sermo humilis*." It might more fully be described as the plain speech of William Tyndale with the more noticeable archaisms edited out. There is something undeniably impressive about the restraint of this style. Its surface calm exceeds that of *The Executioner's Song*, itself a stylistic exception to the clamorous Mailer rule. But how strange it is to be struck more by what a writer has escaped than by what he has achieved.

Searching for a comparison to Mailer's diction-by-subtraction, I found myself thinking of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the 1991 update of an earlier update of the King James Version. The NRSV is in the main a revision by subtraction. As late as the 1952 Revised Standard Version, much of the archaic Jacobean vigor was retained. The 1991 NRSV sacrifices that vigor without gaining the very different kind of energy that only a fresh translation from the original Hebrew and Greek can release.

In short, one cannot achieve an effective idiom either for the Bible or for a Bible-retelling by beginning in King James English and then doubling back to remove the more noticeable archaisms. The effect for the reader, if one does that, is the effect of eating apple peels. The taste reminds one of apple. There is even the occasional morsel of actual apple. But the experience overall is an experience of frustration.

Such is the experience of reading *The Gospel according to the Son*. Mailer's real voice is missing. The voice of Jesus as one might hear it in a contemporary translation of the Gospels from the original Greek is missing. Even the vigor of faux-Jacobean is missing. What is present is only Mailer's almost eerie ability to manage all these subtractions and still have something left. If in this impotent, denatured language he had chosen to offer some shocking or otherwise arresting revision of the received story, the effect of the contrast might still have been strong, though it is perhaps late in the day for that sort of thing.

As it is, Mailer has offered a quiet, sweet, almost wan little book, a kindly offering from a New York Jew to his wife's Bible Belt family. It won't loom large either in the Mailer canon or on the list of artworks inspired by the life of Christ, but it is an honest effort that deserves much better than it has received. □

Jack Miles *is the author of* God: A Biography *(Vintage).*

JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM

Walker Percy
A Life
Patrick Samway
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $35, 488 pp.

J. Bottom

Some writers are remembered mostly for how they wrote, and some writers are remembered mostly for how they lived. When Walker Percy died in 1990 at the age of seventy-four, there seemed little doubt that he belonged among those known primarily for their writing. His life had been largely uneventful, marked by little beyond his conversion to Roman Catholicism and the tuberculosis that put an end to his medical career in the early 1940s. And in six novels, from *The Moviegoer* in 1961 to *The Thanatos Syndrome* in 1987, he had left a substantial body of fiction, serious in purpose, popular in form, and elegantly written.

In the seven years since his death, however, Walker Percy's biography has emerged as a topic of unusual interest. The writer led what was in many ways a narrow and even tidy life, but tidy lives are not so common anymore: "If a total stranger," he wrote of the hero of his second novel, *The Last Gentleman* (1966), "had thrust into his palm a note which read: *Meet me on the NE corner of Lindell Blvd. and Kings Highway in Saint Louis 9 A.M. next Thursday—have news of utmost importance*, he'd have struck out for Saint Louis (the question is, how many people nowadays would not?)." Though Percy managed, with considerable self-conscious irony and humor, to keep the canvas of his own life deliberately small, he painted within its confines an utterly compelling picture. He had, in the hackneyed phrase, a gift for friendship,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and from many sources after his death—but particularly from Jay Tolson's 1992 biography, *Pilgrim in the Ruins*—readers learned of the importance of his lifelong friendship with the historian and novelist Shelby Foote (*see Commonweal*, February 28, 1997) and the early support he received from the fascinating character of the Southern Gentleman who was his Uncle Will.

And yet, I cannot help but feel that, though the popular image of Walker Percy's life has developed, the image of his writing has begun to fade a little around the edges. Who now, among general readers, is able to bring firmly to mind the plot of *The Moviegoer*? Who now can recollect precisely what it was that made *Love in the Ruins* (with its marvelous subtitle, "The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World") seem in 1971 one of the most astonishing best-sellers in years? Even while the public learns of Walker Percy—Catholic apologist, Southern intellectual, amateur linguistic philosopher, and correspondent of many of the most interesting figures of his time—it may need reminding of why it should much care about Walker Percy, writer of novels.

One unfortunate consequence of all this is that the new biography *Walker Percy: A Life* by Patrick H. Samway, S.J., though excellent in many ways, is not quite the book we need on Percy now. The literary editor of *America* magazine and an acquaintance of the novelist, Samway is a student of Southern literature and the editor of two Percy volumes: a posthumous gathering of the novelist's fugitive pieces, *Signposts in a Strange Land*, and a collection of letters exchanged with Kenneth Laine Ketner on the linguistic philosophy of Charles Saunders Pierce, *A Thief of Pierce*.

Samway's new work is the fruit of many years of toil, and it quickly becomes obvious why Percy gave this biographer his blessing and assistance. A painstaking scholar rather than a freewheeling critic—his study of William Faulkner, for example, is a close reading of the typescripts—Samway has carefully assembled and set in a generally competent narrative astonishing amounts of information about the novelist. At times, in fact, the stream of detail becomes something of a problem in the book: It's hard to imagine an anecdote involving Joseph Liebling, Jean Stafford, and Alfred Knopf being dull, but Samway's effort to show all sides of the controversy that swirled around the presentation of the National Book Award to Percy for *The Moviegoer* buries the story in overreporting.

For the most part, there are no surprises in *Walker Percy*. Samway's work consists not so much of new facts about the novelist as new confirmation and new detail. From that detail there emerges, for me at least, a greater appreciation of the freedom given to Percy by his inherited wealth—a freedom, for instance, to practice by writing two apprentice works, *The Charterhouse* and *The Gramercy Winner*, before producing, at age forty-five, his first published novel. So too, readers will receive from Samway's wealth of information—about, for instance, the continuing irritation the novelist felt with the blighted attempts to film his stories—a new appreciation for the seriousness with which Percy watched and thought about movies.

What Samway's readers will not receive, however, is the reason they should concern themselves with all these details, for the biographer is not a compelling literary critic. *Walker Percy* is the sort of study that presupposes its subject's importance and the widespread knowledge of his writing. But those days are nearly gone, I think, in which one could assume that Walker Percy is a writer for the ages. This is in part the novelist's fault. He started late—when he accused himself of laziness, Shelby Foote declared that he was merely feeling guilty for all the years he wasted before he found his vocation as a writer at thirty-five—and he invested too much effort in what was a fairly unimportant linguistic theory that ought to have been, like Yeats's foray into cosmology with *A Vision*, nothing more than a device for focusing his artistic imagination. The result is that he never did quite manage to produce that single great work his talent promised. And without such a work, the literary image of a writer necessarily begins to fade.

We need, in other words, someone to make the case for Walker Percy, not as an interesting man, but as an important writer. Samway deserves great praise for gathering all the biographical information one could ever imagine necessary for making that case, but he has left the more serious and pressing task to others. □

J. Bottom *is associate editor of* First Things *and a contributing editor of the* Weekly Standard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARSING THE SILENCE

Upholding Mystery
An Anthology of Contemporary Christian Poetry
David Impastato, editor
Oxford, $25, 369 pp.

Daria Donnelly

According to an oft invoked joke, writers of poetry currently outnumber readers. Despite the increasing popularity of poetry slams and festivals, we Americans do not read poetry at the rate we read papers, magazines, mysteries, novels, and nonfiction. The general press, and even established reviews like the *New York Times Book Review*, rarely pay attention to new volumes of poetry.

It is against this background that the unusual design of David Impastato's anthology of contemporary Christian poetry makes sense. Impastato seeks the widest possible audience for these poems, an audience which includes persons who do not normally read contemporary verse, persons who will read to enrich their faith lives, as well as readers of contemporary poetry who want to discover what kinds of poems religiously engaged poets are writing. To make the volume inviting to these disparate readers, Impastato has eschewed standard anthology practices. He has limited the number of included poets to fifteen. He has organized the poems thematically, into sixteen "major areas of Christian attention," ranging from "The Cross" to "Wayfarers" to "The Holy." He has interspersed the poems with generous orienting notes, which should be particularly helpful for people intimidated by poetry.

Impastato's muse in making these editorial choices is the poet-scholar Jonathan Holden. Not only did Holden's *The Fate of American Poetry* introduce Impastato to the five least familiar poets included in the anthology—Scott Cairns, David Citino, David Craig, David Brendan Hopes, Andrew Hudgins—but it also provided him with a manifesto on behalf of accessibility. Holden argues that his fellow academics have driven away readers by making a fetish of poetic difficulty and promoting poets and poetic movements (such as modernism) which have terrified a general readership. I disagree with both Holden's definition of difficulty and his argument against it, and this disagreement forms my reservations about Impastato's anthology.

First, strong praise: The anthology is a cornucopia of good poets and accomplished poems. In addition to the poets mentioned above, Impastato includes Richard Wilbur, Kathleen Norris, Les Murray, Denise Levertov, Geoffrey Hill, Louise Erdrich, Sister Maura Eichner, Annie Dillard, Wendell Berry, and Father Daniel Berrigan. This is a wonderful and diverse group. Generational differences emerge with astonishing clarity: The younger poets tend to work with narrative and personae, and draw on a faith strongly inflected by ethnicity. The older poets, by contrast, grapple with artistic and religious tradition.

"Uncollected poems. That's my problem, too."

For readers who have already enjoyed the work of the established poets, the lesser-known ones will be a revelation. Cairns conceals a strenuous belief under a designedly diffident voice; Craig writes incantatory catalogues; in his lush language, Hopes praises what might be called the "thinginess" of being. Hudgins revisits religious scenes too early declared depleted, and boldly dances on the precipice of the maudlin. His "At the Piano," in which a woman tearfully recalls to her second husband a traumatic childhood event (she led the congregation in song while her preacher father was beaten by thugs), is unforgettable, religiously and psychologically full, blending comedy and terror in a manner reminiscent of the best Flannery O'Connor. By contrast, his "Praying Drunk" squanders the rhyme between despair and prayer: "Forgive me. This is my favorite sin: despair—/whose love I celebrate with wine and prayer." The echo provides no insight, and makes the speaker sound like a greeting card rather than the half-cocked seeker that Hudgins wants to limn. Contrast Hudgins's lines with Emily Dickinson's renunciation of love: "You there—I—here—/With just the Door ajar/That Oceans are—and Prayer—/And that White Sustenance—/Despair." Her stunning rhyme, achieved in the context of a difficult, blasphemous, and antiromantic poem, will not let us repress the absence always throbbing within prayer. The more you linger over her arrangement, the more it yields. Though all the anthologized poets are good storytellers and engaging writers, and many of them masterly stylists (for example, Richard Wilbur), only Geoffrey Hill consistently sustains that level of attention to language.

Reading *Upholding Mystery* is like visiting a museum where the pictures are arranged by subject rather than painter and chronology. To look at a room of pictures depicting the crucifixion is an entirely different aesthetic experience from standing in a room given over to the work of Giotto and Cimabue. The former might be more spiritually and aesthetically intense, as one takes in aspects of the represented event, and stops fret-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

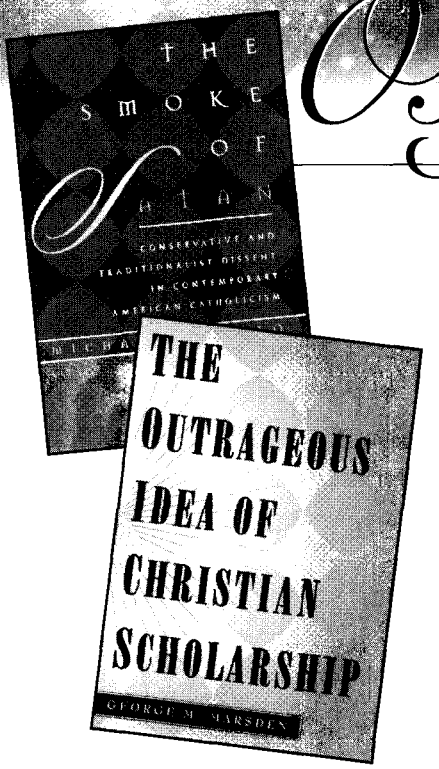
ting over the who's who of art. But it equally might exaggerate the whole issue of quality and qualitative difference. What clearly is put off to the side in this more postmodern arrangement is sustained attention to the particular labor of the individual artist. I realized in reading the anthology that I am hopelessly Romantic: For me, poetry is the human person striving for adequate language against the pull of (a religiously superior) silence. I finally felt I had heard the poems when I went back and read through the book poet by poet. This is not easy to do since the volume lacks an index and has a bewildering table of contents.

In his introductory remarks about the parallels between a postmodern and a Christian sensibility, Impastato hedges about whether the author and his or her intentions matter. He imagines that, because the Bible has "all individuality of authorship...smashed out of it," the Christian poet is "comfortable with the 'polyphony of self' that language [in the postmodern view] is said to mirror." Such a view is exasperatingly incomplete: Saint Paul understood the polyphony of self, and credited it as the source of our most intense anguish (*see* Romans 6:14-25). It is telling that Impastato includes no poems which consider the uncomfortable difficulties of writing poetry, particularly Christian poetry (poems like Geoffrey Hill's "God's Little Mountain," "Three Baroque Meditations," or the more recent "Cycle"). Despite allusions to Auschwitz, alcoholism, domestic violence, environmental degradation, and animal experimentation, this collection seems more genial than our age deserves, and this is because difficulty—whether located in language, the act of composition, the struggle to believe, or the poet's grappling with a Romantic legacy of competition between poets and God—is disallowed.

Finally, I very much missed the voices of two superlative Catholic poets, Elizabeth Sewell and Sarah Appleton. Their work is attentive, beautiful, and transforming. □

Daria Donnelly *is a free-lance writer. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

N E W F R O M Oxford


THE SMOKE OF SATAN
CONSERVATIVE AND TRADITIONALIST DISSENT IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CATHOLICISM
THE OUTRAGEOUS IDEA OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP
GEORGE M. MARSDEN

THE CRISIS IN THE CHURCHES
Spiritual Malaise, Fiscal Woe
Robert Wuthnow

Why are America's churches in financial distress? Robert Wuthnow, a leading commentator on religious life in America, asserts that the steady drop in donations, volunteering, and personal involvement is a direct result of a spiritual crisis—a crisis caused in large part by the clergy's failure to address the vital relationships between faith and money, work, stewardship, giving, and economic justice. In *The Crisis in the Churches*, Wuthnow offers a searching study of this financial crisis and of the spiritual vacuum that has silently grown worse. $30.00, 304 pp.

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF WORLD RELIGIONS
Edited by John Bowker

A gold mine of information on religions, movements, and cults around the globe and across the centuries, this book contains 8,200 alphabetical entries penned by some eighty contributors, representing the full spectrum of religious experience. $55.00, 1136 pp.

THE OUTRAGEOUS IDEA OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP
George M. Marsden

"An exciting and thought-provoking work for anyone who cares about the future of the university and education today"—*Commonweal.* "Marsden presents his 'outrageous idea' with such calm, persuasive power and fundamental decency that it is hard to imagine any person of good will taking exception. He here reaffirms his status as one of our leading interpreters of religion and contemporary American culture"—Jean Bethke Elshtain. "A masterly explanation and defense of Christian learning in the contemporary world, displaying the learning it advocates"—Nicholas Wolterstorff. "For all those who take seriously the command to 'love the Lord your God...with all your mind,' Marsden's book is essential reading"—*Christianity Today.* $22.00, 152 pp.

THE SMOKE OF SATAN
Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism
Michael W. Cuneo

"From CUFF to the Mystical Marianists and Apocalypticists, Cuneo has charted out the intricate relationships that currently exist among the groups on the American Catholic right.... Cuneo's interlacing of background information, descriptions of beliefs, and his personal interactions with his subjects make for a fascinating account"—Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz. "Cuneo writes like a top-notch reporter, but his work is based on high-quality sociological research which cuts through the mundane and goes to the essential. A magnificently structured study of right-wing Catholic groups.... Cuneo tells it like it is, because he has done the painstaking footwork needed to understand what this strange phenomenon is all about"—Jean-Guy Vaillancourt. $27.50, 256 pp.

At better bookstores. Or call 1-800-451-7556 (M-F, 9-5 EST) www.oup-usa.org
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GREEN TALK FROM PULPITS

And God Saw That It Was Good
Catholic Theology and the Environment
Drew Christiansen and Walter Grazer, eds.
United States Catholic Conference, $24.95, 354 pp.

The Best Preaching on Earth
Sermons on Caring for Creation
Stan L. LeQuire, ed.
Evangelical Environmental Network and Judson Press, $16, 221 pp.

William Simpson

Environmental theologians now struggle to untangle themselves from the collapse of the death-of-nature rhetoric that they so eagerly joined over the last dozen years. After a long, noisy public relations crescendo and much crisis mongering and panic peddling among religious groups, political activists, and a most solicitous media culture, the environmental apocalypse has been postponed. But, in truth, the work of environmental justice has barely begun.

Two recent books collect a number of voices and point to new directions, subject matters, and methods for religious argument about the environment. The books' silence about some previous and often exaggerated concerns is as important and instructive as their overt claims.

The Evangelical Environmental Network has chosen to publish twenty-two sermons, most of them preached at churches, chapels, and regional conferences in North America, that are not directed to academic experts and policy makers. And the U.S. Catholic Conference continues its valuable teaching role with eight academic-style arguments, plus the papal message of 1990, "The Ecological Crisis," six very different bishops' conference statements, and some quite usable material for parish teaching and the critical watching of public relations events and commercial news stories about the environment. Some themes stand out in these remarkably encouraging writings.

First, justice for the environment must include, and cannot ignore, justice for the poor on whom environmental damage inflicts the harshest costs. This is preached with utter lucidity by Myron Augsburger: "For many, this gap (between haves and have-nots) is about the extent to which people share in the benefits of creation—land, clean air, fresh water." And by Bob Seiple: "Why would Christians care about the environment? Because left unattended, the environment becomes a poverty issue." Paul Brand shows by anecdote how land-use choice is a form of determinism for the poor, with one outcome in Bangladesh, another outcome in North America. And J. Alfred Smith preaches gracefully about actions against ghetto poverty in Oakland, building the virtue of tranquillity and how nature as such, enduring strains of suffering and degradation, can generate the discipline of tranquillity. These are novel and welcome arguments in environmental discourse.

"Some sort of environmental survey."

The statements of the six Catholic bishops' conferences about conditions in Australia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Lombardy (Italy), the Philippines, and the United States center on the theme of complexity and pluralism. Each situation shows vast differences from every other; effective changes for the better in one region would be irrational elsewhere. Nonuniformity and a profound pluralism is the rule for environmental analysis, spiritual inclusion, and public action. The details, the evidence, the examples, the search for discipline in these papers and sermons lift into full clarity the difficulty that lies ahead of this empirical theological task.

Religious symbols built on nostalgia, or spiritual insights that generate emotional caricature, or disciplines that project Fifty Things You Can Do to Save the Earth, all vie for religious allegiance with the techniques of the TV commercial and the purposes of the media event. Kevin Erwin's very fine essay, "The Sacramentality of Creation and the Role of Creation in Liturgy and Sacraments," addresses this problem directly, from within the Catholic tradition, and with some constructive results. He examines the liturgy of the hours, the pluriform meanings of the symbols of water, technologically produced bread and wine, and their analogical meanings in relation to nature's life systems. And he admits that these practices are not well understood and need much rehearsal and development.

A third theme is fluency with Scripture. Anne Clifford's paper, "Foundations for a Catholic Theology of God," shows that, to some extent, academic theologians are still hung up on how authoritative Genesis narratives need to be for a doctrine of creation, and whether or not the clause "man shall have dominion" (Gen. 1:28) can explain the rise and now the alleged collapse of Western philosophy, theology, patriarchy, and related fragments of a civilization gone wrong.

By contrast, the evangelical preachers are learned, inspired, independent, Protestant, not hung up, and have much to teach the academic teachers about how the Bible can work in contemporary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

culture. Eugene Peterson shows a mastery of how biblical texts come to life in contemporary speech: "Metaphor and simile do not explain [nature]; they draw us from being outsiders into being insiders." Calvin DeWitt uses "The Price of Gopher Wood" in Noah's ark to juxtapose the value in the book of Job. While his conclusion, as a professor of environmental studies, is somewhat predictable, his hermeneutic is free-ranging. And Harold Dean Trulear weaves a spectacular verbal tapestry comparing the city of Laodicea, a location of apocalyptic projections in the book of Revelation, with Paterson, New Jersey. "[The emperor] Domitian still runs the city; he just doesn't live here any more." Trulear drops only one-and-a-half shoes in this sermon; it's not clear in his vision whether the Passaic River basin shows much environmental promise or not. But he can get to that problem another time.

The fourth theme is the understanding, the teaching, and the criticism of scientific expertise. The physical sciences—biochemistry, evolutionary biology, physics, the climate sciences, oceanography—rightly claim authoritative jurisdiction over knowledge of the earth's systems, causation within them, and projections about the futures of these ecologies. Most religious people are very distant from the truth of these findings and the experience of what they might mean. We are easily maneuvered, almost at will, by scientists' press releases promoting particular causes, and by what activist leaders want us to believe about the conditions of our environment. Scientists are also pressing questions of ultimacy about the technologies of nature's systems and groups; the creative origins of the entire universe; and the freedom, lawfulness, and chaos within the natural world that we are said to have despoiled or ruined. So religious communities are at least half-a-century off the pace in reckoning with the truths and the mistakes of this scientific imagination. Sustained reading, critical argument, and the capacity for doubt and dissent are the working relationships that religionists must build with the environmental sciences.

In the USCC book, a paper by David Toolan, S.J., shoulders the entire burden of making theological sense of the natural sciences. It is a wonderful and even breathtaking piece of comprehension, question-raising, and suggestive argument. And John Haught's book *The Promise of Nature*, closely related to his essay, included here, provides much help. Philip Yancey, who writes a very critical and imaginative column in *Christianity Today*, suggests in his sermon that "nature gives off mixed signals," so the argument from design may be quite majestic but not very comforting to humans or to nature's victims. Unfortunately, he is the only preacher in this collection who shows a willingness to enter that debate in sermonic form.

Our love for creation entails an intellectual love for the same world that scientists have been parsing and theorizing about with commanding results. But a handful of inspired people cannot carry all this responsibility in a few lectures, books, and sermons. This is a very large teaching challenge that theologians have barely begun to address, and we need to hear more from them. □

William Simpson *teaches at Fordham University.*

BRAVE NEW WORLD

The Case against the Global Economy
edited by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith
Sierra Club Books, $28, 550 pp.

John Zmirak

When someone argues for a movement by saying that its triumph is "inevitable," it's time to be suspicious. This is the favorite tactic of ideologues, who have used it to promote some of the worst causes in history—from Bolshevism to eugenics. Traces of this "pseudo-inevitabilism" are to be found in many thinkers who have labeled themselves "progressive," from French Jacobins to social Darwinists. As Eric Voegelin liked to point out, such progressivism is a secular knock-off from Augustine's doctrine of history. According to Augustine, history was driven by Providence interacting with human wills. Instead, many modern thinkers imagined that the mechanistic "laws" of history act upon individuals, as gravity attracts particles of matter. Such "progressivism" borrows the certainties of nineteenth-century physical science, to lend greater authority to its vision of the human future.

Now that the Marxist dream has dissipated, the weapon of pseudo-inevitability works for a new political faction—the ideologues of the "global economy." Putatively "right-wing," because their stance is probusiness, proponents of globalization such as Newt Gingrich espouse a revolutionary progressivism which promises to sweep aside every local industry, culture, and institution, and homogenize global society according to the dictates of economic efficiency (narrowly defined as maximized Gross National Product).

There is nothing "conservative" about such an agenda; in fact, it matches Marx's picture of the bourgeoisie as the first great revolutionary class, the leveler of distinctions whose progress reduces all social and family relations to the nexus of cold cash. The more candid among the globalists (such as Milton Friedman) will admit this cheerfully. They sweeten this bitter pill with promises that technological progress and ever-increasing efficiency must increase the overall well-being of the entire planet—just as the selfish operations of the free market produce more wealth for the poor than the altruism of socialist economies. For good measure, they usually suggest that economic liberalization must bring po-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

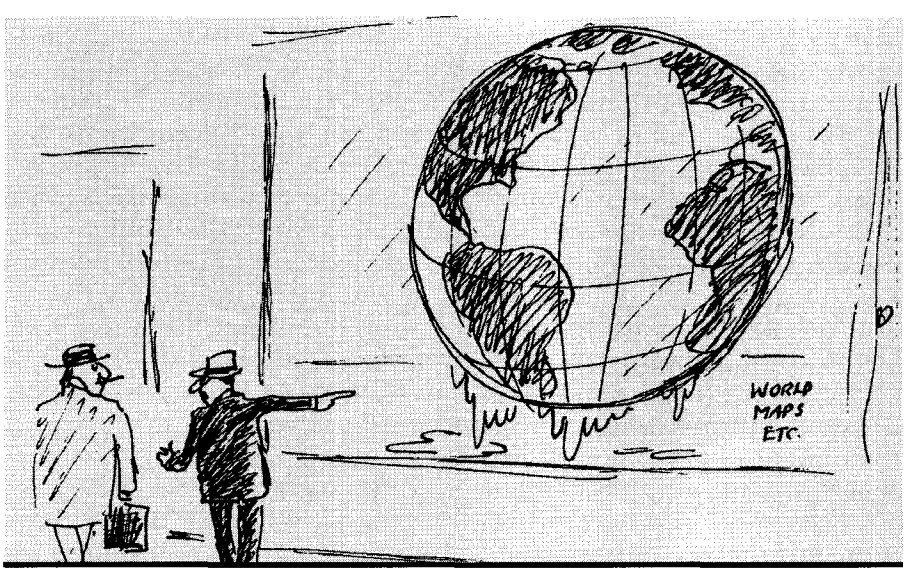
litical liberation (since cash is the great engine of history).

The Case against the Global Economy, an eclectic compilation of essays, does a fine job of exposing the dark side of globalization. The authors in this collection try to debunk the central premises of globalist economic ideology, which run as follows: (1) Globalization is an inevitable process of economic rationalization, (2) driven by autonomous technological and market forces that cannot be stopped, (3) which it is futile and self-destructive for any nation to resist, (4) since any short-term pain caused by the process is outweighed by ultimate "gains" in overall prosperity and freedom.

These assertions have become so deeply ingrained in our politics that they no longer seem open to debate. (On what other policy do the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* consistently agree?) Support for globalization in America spans both political parties, forming a kind of corporate "center party" around which political money, muscle, and respectable opinion cohere. Only at the fringes of either party can dissenters be heard—what Al Gore dubbed the "Halloween coalition" opposing NAFTA, including Ralph Nader, Jesse Jackson, Ross Perot, and Pat Buchanan.

Likewise, this book features significant political variety between its covers. Most of the essayists (including Nader, Kirkpatrick Sale, William Greider, and Jeremy Rifkin) come from points left of the political center; a few hail from the localist or nationalist right (such as Wendell Berry and Sir James Goldsmith). The objections they raise against the rationale and results of globalization vary widely as well. A few of the authors are clearly hostile to private enterprise *per se*; they seem to pine for a socialist command economy, rendered impossible by the slippery nature of wealth in a global economy, among other reasons. These hard-left contributions harm the cause which the book is meant to serve—the creation of a broad-based coalition of skeptics to light the many blind spots in the emerging ideology of globalization.

From the best essays in the book, which include the contributions of Berry, Goldsmith, and Hermann Daly, there is much to learn. Taken as a whole, they offer an alternative definition of the move toward globalization (which Daly prefers to call "universal economic deregulation"). First, such deregulation is the result of conscious political decisions, promoted by multinational corporations and certain political elites. Second, its proponents stand to benefit from this movement, through cheap labor, cheap goods, low environmental standards, and the destruction of smaller competitors. Third, this trend can be frustrated or rendered less harmful by concerted resistance of local and national communities. And last, if not thwarted, its results will be economic inequity, cultural homogenization, environmental degradation, and ever-more-centralized economic and governmental power.



This book will appeal to (and I think, persuade) readers of many different interests. Students of literature and culture will be moved by Berry's defense of local agriculture and local economics—which he argues are essential to local culture. The price of succumbing to the universalizing economy, he suggests, is the universal triumph of the "technological monoculture" exported from Hollywood and Disneyworld, *via* Blockbuster and Walmart.

Economists must take seriously Daly's argument that globalization is not really efficient; in the absence of global environmental standards (a patent impossibility), the freedom to operate anywhere in the world allows companies to dump their waste (and externalize their costs) on innocent third parties—and thus to prosper by stealing. Likewise, David Korten demonstrates that Adam Smith would not have approved of NAFTA and GATT, since his competitive theory was designed to diminish monopolies—such as the transnational corporations which benefit from these treaties.

Honest political thinkers cannot dismiss Goldsmith's warnings about the impact of plummeting wages (only partly compensated by cheap goods) on the social peace of Western nations, or the effect of environmental dumping on the third world. Nader's analysis of the corrosive politics of GATT must disturb any friend of constitutional government.

And so on. This collection is uneven, disturbing, eccentric, and provocative. In a time of bubbling markets and heady promises, it makes for sober thinking. It also shows a convergence of left- and right-wing thinkers into a consensus that values localism, traditional culture, and community values over economic and technological "progress." If these thinkers keep working together, who knows? They may stumble right into the forgotten realm of Catholic social teaching. Chesterton's distributism may have a future, after all. □

John Zmirak *is a business writer and novelist living in New York City. He received his Ph.D. in English literature from Louisiana State University in 1996.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

democracy perseveres? Donohue and his group surely deserve a more balanced appraisal.

IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ
New Brunswick, N.J.

The writer is Hannah Arendt Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Political Science at Rutgers University.

Carlin got it wrong

I hope David Carlin, for whom I have affection and respect, will take a fresh and closer look at the "semiparanoid" Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. Simply put, the League seeks to vindicate the right of Catholics to enjoy the same privileges as other citizens.

As a matter of policy, the League does not engage in the public philosophical debates on abortion, homosexual marriage, condoms in schools, or the other issues that are ripping at the fabric of our society. But it will challenge a manager in a government agency who directs an employee to wipe the ashes off her forehead on Ash Wednesday. And it will challenge an educational institution which permits a demeaning, vulgar display of a caricature of the Virgin Mary and then seeks to silence those who object.

The League does not challenge the right of any person to proclaim, "I do not believe." But it will fight any attempt to restrict one who would proclaim, "I believe!"

Carlin warns that, unless the League backs off, those who reject Christianity will go "underground," shifting from open criticism to "campaigning against traditional Christian moral rules and values" from behind trees and bushes.

That suggests that, if Catholics will shut up when demeaned, the long-standing high-pressure drive to impose new rules and values on society will be suspended or moderated. I doubt it.

JOHN P. HALE
Poughquag, N.Y.

The writer, an attorney, is a member of the Catholic League's advisory board.

The author replies

I am unhappy to find myself on the opposite side of this question from John Hale, for whom I have high regard, and Professor Horowitz, who has been one of the truly great figures in American sociology during the past few decades. But Mr. Donohue's far-fetched notion that the Catholic case is somehow analogous to the case of blacks makes me think my criticism may well be on target.

Catholics are treated very well in America; the same is not always true of Catholicism. But Catholicism is, among other things, a system of ideas; and there are some people—secularists on the one hand, Protestant fundamentalists on the other—who believe this system of ideas is erroneous, even dangerous. Under the rules of the American game, such people are free to criticize Catholicism; and the right to criticism includes the right to satirize, lampoon, etc.—in other words, the right to create unfair and offensive caricatures.

Horowitz says that "[t]he battleground has shifted...to the cultural domain." So what? Surely he doesn't intend to join the legions of multiculturalists who say that any belief or practice that can be brought under a cultural umbrella is therefore immune to criticism?

A relative of mine recently resided six months in a place outside the United States. When she discovered that a neighbor was maltreating his dog, she protested. The neighbor defended his conduct by saying, "Our culture is different from yours; here we beat our dogs." A week later she protested again when she discovered that he was beating his wife, and he offered the same justification: "In our culture we beat our wives."

I don't say that Catholics should not resent insulting and unfair criticism of their religion. They most definitely should resent it. They should rebut the criticism, fight back, retaliate, boycott, etc. In doing this they keep alive the good old American tradition of free speech. But they shouldn't claim that their civil rights have been violated, for in so doing they will have a chilling effect on free speech.

By the way, I don't deny that Mr. Donohue is a talented publicist and organizer. Clearly he is. And in fairness I should admit to a grudging respect for his willingness to stand up and fight for his religion—a willingness all too lacking among American Catholics today.

One last point. Mr. Donohue seems to believe that I am a "progressive" Catholic. In fact I regard the so-called progressives as foolish. At the same time, I don't believe they have a monopoly on folly.

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

Become a Commonweal Associate

CLASSIFIED

RATES: $1.10 per word; 12 word minimum. Discounts 5 percent, 3 times; 10 percent, 6 times; 15 percent, 12 times. Advance payment required. Discounts and monthly billing available for repeat advertisers. For additional information call 212-732-0800 or write COMMONWEAL, 15 Dutch St., Room 502, New York, NY 10038-3760.

Ministry Program

WANT TO BE A PRIEST, RELIGIOUS, LAY MINISTER (MALE OR FEMALE) IN THE CHURCH? Mater Dei Institute for Ministry Formation. Providing theological degrees and pastoral leadership preparation. Write: Mater Dei, Gonzaga University, 405 E. Sinto, Spokane, WA 99202-1849. 1-800-633-2252, ext. 360. Financial help available.

Manuscripts Wanted

MANUSCRIPTS WANTED. ALL TYPES. Subsidy Publisher with 75-year tradition. 1-800-695-9599.

Director Needed

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Dynamic organization in multi-cultural community is seeking bilingual (English & Spanish) member of religious order or ordained clergy with prior leadership experience in community-based organization. For more information call 415/456-1443. Mail/Fax résumé and cover letter to Canal Ministry, Box 3905, San Rafael, CA 94912.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TRY, TRY AGAIN

Jacqueline Bell Mosio

I used to think that the really brilliant and famous of this world were different from you and me because they did things right the first time. Working at a distinguished architectural firm with accomplished architects, I finally learned what the real differences are.

As project secretary, I watched the design for a building complex take shape on the desks of thirty architects. One of the firm's partners had created the design concept, and the staff was working out the plans down to exact details of flooring and banister styles. The work advanced, supervised by the senior architect in charge of the project. The deadline was imminent but manageable.

Team architects drew the concept into a two-dimensional reality, while assistants measured, cut, and glued thin foamboard to create a model complete with green areas, roadways, sponge-bowered trees, and tiny cars. Then the senior architect visited each project area, accompanied by the design architect. The following morning the team architects puttered at their desks while a meeting went on in the conference room where the key architects sat around a narrow black table with the model in the center. That afternoon brought a general meeting. The outcome of it all was—revision.

Now the pace picked up; the architects worked overtime and under pressure to make the changes. Review was constant. "Didn't you finish that plan yesterday?" I asked someone working on the same plan again. Yes, but it had been revised, was the answer, and the tone of voice made it clear it could be revised many more times. I don't know if the architects were pushed beyond their limits reworking the plans, but they were pushed. What distinguished the really good architects was precisely a willingness to revise, rework, redo.

I was particularly interested in the building's central courtyard, to be made of specially cut stone arranged in an intricate pattern. A young architect worked on the courtyard drawing for months. Each time he achieved what seemed the epitome of design elegance, the concept architect would come by, make changes, and push it further.

Day by day, the deadline neared. Individual areas were revised and revised again. While some of the changes were mandated by the owners or were determined by the availability of materials, others seemed part of an ongoing process of clarification and refinement. After an intense weekend of round-the-clock work, the plans were finally sent off for review. For a few days the fog-eyed architects stayed home or came in late. This was only the first stage, however. The next set of plans had to be readied, so the entire process was repeated: more revisions, more plans redone, over and over again.

If witnessing this procedure wasn't enough to disabuse me of the idea that architectural ideas spring perfectly formed from the heads of brilliant people, then working with the architects on letters, lists, even memos, did. A large part of my work consisted of turning handwritten drafts into perfect final products. The same zest for revision dominated all work given to me by the architects. Could this paragraph be phrased better? Was that item really correct? Double check it. Rewrite. The documents were reviewed by others and their suggestions incorporated—often into what I had thought was the finished product. Even in the hands of Federal Express a document was not safe from revision.

Detail was treated with reverence. Thick books of specifications went out with each set of drawings. The sheer mass of quantitative detail was numbing, but necessary to the material expression of the design's fine points: the shape of the buildings' corners against the sky, the feel of an open area, the exact tones of the facing under the sun in that geographical location, the size of pebbles for the walkways, the sound of water in a semi-enclosed space. The royal path from imagination to reality is paved with details.

Besides learning to respect the powers of revision and developing a passion for detail, there were other lessons I learned. The supervising architect had the uncanny habit of appearing at just the moment something less than correct was happening. He seemed to have a connection with the project that drew him to any disorder, whether it was the result of distraction, oversight, or conscious decision. I learned to predict when he would appear.

The other lesson came in a flash as I looked at the final project drawings. What I saw—when I stopped thinking of courtyard, stairways, walls, entrances and elevator shafts—was a harmoniously balanced design, delicately drawn and beautiful. It was perfect in itself, like an old hand-drawn map valued for its artistic attributes as much as for the city it traces out. The architectural plan as drawing had a mandala-like quality: It seemed to invite me into the experience of a larger design.

The real difference between the brilliant and the famous and the rest of us is the set of qualities that precedes the fame: a willingness to review and revise, to settle for nothing less than perfection, a limitless capacity for attention to detail, and a deep caring that cables a connection to the work. Then there's something about working outward from—or is it inward toward—an absolutely perfect and beautiful inner design. □

Jacqueline Bell Mosio *is a translator and writer living in New York.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Silent Disaster in North Korea

Slow, chronic starvation on a massive scale

Photo: World Food Programme/UN

Hundreds of children dead of starvation

Hospitals and schools nearly empty

Factories shut down

Trees stripped bare, people reduced to eating bark, wood pulp, ground stalks...

(Observations by United Nations officials)

"The twenty-three million people of North Korea are not our enemies, whatever one may think of the regime that governs them. It is imperative that Americans respond to this campaign for food aid, on the scale of previous aid to Somalia ($330 million) and other famine zones."

Bruce Cumings, Korea Expert and Author, Northwestern University

Severe floods in 1995 and 1996 devastated crops, housing, and irrigation systems in North Korea. Economic isolation means there is little foreign exchange with which to buy food on the world market. Public food rationing has distributed the shortages fairly evenly across the population, but for months rations have been only half a bowl of rice per day.

And the disaster remains silent.
Few pictures flash across the international media. So we appeal to you.

What you can do

- Make a contribution to the AFSC Korea Relief Fund. One hundred percent of donated money is used to purchase food and ship it immediately. The distribution of food aid is monitored by UN World Food Programme staff to insure it reaches those who are hungry.
- Urge the Clinton Administration to give $100 million. A starving child knows no politics.

American Friends Service Committee • Korea Relief Fund
1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102 • Call toll free 1-888-588-AFSC

- ☐ My contribution is enclosed
- ☐ $250 will buy one ton of rice and feed 75 people for one month
- ☐ $125 will provide two weeks of food for 100 children
- ☐ $60 will feed six families for one month
- ☐ $20 will feed two families for one month

Please make checks payable to AFSC

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Credit Card No. _____

Exp.date _____

CW97

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEFORE HE CAN RUN, HE HAS TO WALK. BUT BEFORE HE CAN WALK AGAIN, SOMEONE'S GOING TO GIVE HIM BACK THE CONFIDENCE TO USE HIS LEGS.

DALLAS,
TEXAS
MARCH 17, 1997
2:23 P.M.

WE SALUTE THESE EVERYDAY HEROES, AND LOOK OUT FOR THEM WITH DIVERSE PENSION AND RETIREMENT PROGRAMS, THAT GIVE MUSCLE TO OUR MISSION.

OUR COMMITMENT IS FUNDAMENTAL: TO HELP PROVIDE THOSE WHO WORK IN NOT FOR PROFIT, A FUTURE BASED ON SOUND GROWTH, NOT UNDUE RISK. THAT'S THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA.

MUTUAL OF AMERICA
320 PARK AVE., NEW YORK, NY 10022 • 1 800 468 3785

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED